

## King, Mubarak exchange views

ROCHESTER (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on Monday exchanged views on the latest developments on the Iraqi front as well as the Middle East peace process. In a telephone call, President Mubarak offered his best wishes to the King on the occasion of the start of the fasting month of Ramadan and inquired about His Majesty's health conditions. The Egyptian leader wished the King continued good health and happiness and a safe return home.

# Jordan Times

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## Chad leader breaks Libya embargo

TRIPOLI (AFP) — Chad President Idriss Deby flew into the Libyan capital Monday, violating the U.N. air embargo on the tenth anniversary of the Lockerbie airliner bombing which sparked the ban. The United Nations imposed the air embargo and economic sanctions in 1992 in a so far unsuccessful attempt to force Tripoli to handover two of its nationals accused in the destruction of a Pan Am airliner over Scotland, killing 270 people. At least ten African heads of state have violated the embargo since September, after the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) decided to stop observing the ban.

## Tasting food does not break fast

RIYADH (AFP) — A taste of food does not break the dusk to dawn fast of the Muslim holy month so long as no food is swallowed, senior religious officials declared Monday. "In case of need, just tasting food, without ever swallowing, cannot break the Ramadan fast," said a fatwa or decree from the Saudi scientific research committee in Riyadh. All Muslims are called on to abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset during the lunar month of Ramadan which began Saturday-Sunday. Islamic scholars have long debated the question of tasting food which particularly tempts those involved in preparing the iftar evening meal.

## Ecevit fails to form new government

ANKARA (AP) — President Suleyman Demirel appeared likely to turn to some widely trusted lawmaker to form Turkey's next government, after a veteran politician abandoned efforts Monday to persuade bickering political leaders to support him in a pro-solitary coalition. Bulent Ecevit of the Democratic Left Party failed in a three-week-old attempt to form a government that could command a majority of votes in parliament. "It is now clear that no party leader can form a government that can win a vote of confidence," former Premier Mesut Yilmaz said after talks with Demirel.

## Israeli 'spies' plead not guilty

LARNACA (AFP) — Two Israelis accused of espionage pleaded not guilty in a Larnaca court on Monday. Udi Argev, 37, and Igal Damari, 49, pleaded not guilty to charges of spying, conspiracy to commit espionage and possession of banned listening equipment. The two suspected Mossad agents were arrested on Nov. 9 in the southern fishing village of Zygi. The pair's second request in a month to be released into the custody of the Israeli embassy was rejected Monday.

## Cypriot minister cleared of graft charges

NICOSIA (AFP) — Embattled Cypriot Interior Minister Dimos Michaelides has been cleared by cabinet-appointed investigators of two corruption charges, Attorney General Alecos Markides said Monday. "There is no evidence to justify criminal proceedings against the interior minister for either of the allegations investigated," Markides said after studying the investigators' report. The accusations by parliament watchdog committee chairman and ruling Disy party member Christos Poursourides, concerned unlawful enrichment through the sale of apartments and abuse of power at the immigration department.

# Iraq rules out any conditions, demands censure of U.S., U.K.

## Aziz: 62 soldiers dead, 180 wounded in raids

### Agencies

IRAQI DEPUTY Prime Minister Tariq Aziz demanded Monday that Britain and the United States be brought to book for the four-night aerial blitz against Iraq and ruled out any conditions for future talks.

"We will never, never accept any conditions," he said. "Any talks, any discussion, unilaterally, directly with us or within the Security Council about the future shall not be accepted by Iraq unless first the aggressors should be made accountable for their aggression," Aziz told a press conference.

"This aggression should be the focus of discussion in any forum," Aziz insisted. "They are criminals and this aggression is a criminal aggression." Meanwhile in New York, the Security Council began discussions of the aftermath of the bombings amid sharp divisions on the future of the U.N. weapons inspection regime.

Britain and the United States insist the U.N. Special Commission for disarmament (UNSCOM) should verify that Iraq no longer holds any weapons of mass destruction before sanctions can be lifted.

"Iraq refuses, refuses all these conditions," Aziz said. "We shall never, ever accept any conditions made by Clinton or Blair. Iraq refuses all these conditions totally and strongly."

Once President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Tony Blair had been brought to account, "then and with that the embargo on Iraq should be lifted," Aziz said.

"Iraq cannot tolerate the embargo and UNSCOM, then the aggression was added," Aziz said.

"If anybody wants to find a political solution, this is the legal and political solution." Asked how Iraq could rebuild relations with the United Nations, Aziz said: "We did not damage our relations with the United Nations, they damaged the United Nations itself. They acted according to the law of the jungle."

"It is their (U.S. and Britain's) responsibility to rebuild their relations with the United Nations." Iraq would refuse any conditions set out by Washington and London to resume relations with the United Nations, he insisted.

In revealing the first official figures on military casualties, Aziz said 62 Iraqi soldiers died and 180 were wounded in the four nights of the U.S.-British aerial onslaught against Iraq.

He accused Britain and the United States of lying about their achievements in the assault which ended Sunday night and detailed the toll on military personnel.

"The serious damage was in the civilian area," Aziz told a press conference.

But he gave no figures for civilians saying only they were much more higher than the military casualties.

Iraqi Ambassador to the United Nations Nizar Hamdoun said Sunday that thousands of people were killed or wounded in the U.S. and British air strikes. But he gave no breakdown either.

"Clinton and Blair lied and lied to their people," Aziz charged.

"After the suspension (of the air attacks) they gave an account of their achievements, here they lied again."

Azz noted that Blair and Clinton "boasted great success" in their stated aim which was to "weaken and diminish

... Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard."

Azz declared the weapons inspection programme of the UNCOM is now over, and the only solution would be lifting of economic sanctions imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

"Iraq cannot tolerate the embargo and UNSCOM," Aziz said, adding that the British and the American attacks have "killed UNSCOM."

"UNSCOM is their casualty," he said.

The commission is responsible for dismantling Iraq's weapons of mass destruction — chemical, biological or nuclear weapons and missiles with ranges in excess of 150 kilometres.

In halting the air strikes Saturday, President Clinton said the 70-hour assault had severely damaged President Saddam Hussein's ability to build weapons of mass destruction. Clinton ordered the air strikes after a report by UNSCOM chief Richard Butler said Iraq was obstructing the inspectors' work.

Azz noted that Blair and Clinton "boasted great success" in their stated aim which was to "weaken and diminish

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Iraqis buy some food at a Baghdad market on Monday. Life in the Iraqi capital returned to normal but has just become a little harder for its sanctions-hit people as food prices rise sharply, not because of bombings but strong demand due to seasonal celebrations (AFP photo)

## Knesset approves early elections bill

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The Israeli parliament Monday approved at first reading a bill calling for early elections.

The bill presented by the opposition was approved by 81 votes to 30, with four abstentions, and five MPs in the 120-member House did not take part in the vote, speaker Dan Tikhon said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu voted for the bill as did hawkish Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon and more moderate Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai.

Two more readings will be necessary over the next few weeks for the bill to become law, bringing elections both for parliament and the post of prime minister within three to six months instead of November 2000.

Netanyahu tried right up to the last-minute to prevent approval of the bill issuing a last ditch appeal to opposition Labour leader Ehud Barak to join a government of national unity. But Barak made clear he would continue to reject the overture even if MPs granted the prime minister the three days' grace for talks which he sought.

The Knesset rejected Netanyahu's peace policies 56 to 48, with two abstentions. The vote on elections was

put, a few absent legislators returned to the chamber, and it was approved 81 to 30, with four abstentions.

Netanyahu had said earlier he would negotiate an elections date with the opposition. Media reports said they could come any time between the end of March and the beginning of June.

Just before the vote on peace policies, Netanyahu approached the Knesset podium and launched into an appeal for a national unity government.

It was an about-face for Netanyahu, who had counted out such appeals from members in his coalition. Now he appealed for unity.

He suggested a time-out of 72 hours to negotiate national unity. "We will investigate possibility to come together ... if we don't succeed at least we tried at this critical moment for Israel."

Barak refused. "It's a little too late," Barak said, adding that he doubted the sincerity of the offer.

The Knesset's spectators' gallery was packed with dignitaries as the political drama got under way. A sticker posted in the parliament's halls read, "Come on, Sara, let's go home" — referring to Netanyahu's wife.

## Arab League considers Arab summit

### Anti-U.S. protests continue

CAIRO (Agencies) — The head of the Arab League on Monday began consulting Arab foreign ministers on a request to convene a summit over the U.S.-British air strikes on Iraq.

The Arab summit would be the first since June 1996, shortly after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was elected to office, sparking fears among Arabs that the peace process would be set back.

Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel

Meguid announced that he had contacted the foreign ministers of the 22 Arab League members to inform them of Yemen's request for an Arab summit to discuss the Iraq situation.

However, Arab diplomats in Cairo say it is unlikely such a summit will be held because of opposition from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

At the end of a League meeting on the U.S.-British

air strikes, Kuwaiti delegate Abdul Aal Al Kinal said his country "does not oppose holding an Arab summit to relaunch Arab solidarity."

But he said, "inter-Arab" frankness must be guaranteed before the reconciliation.

Representatives from Jordan, Morocco, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates expressed support for holding an Arab summit, which

was backed Sunday by Egypt.

The Syrian delegate, however, said he was not authorised to speak on the issue.

At a news conference, Abdel Meguid denied speculation the summit was being used as an excuse to mask a weak reaction by Arab governments to the military strikes against Iraq, which sparked angry public protests throughout the Arab

World.

"To stop this kind of military power is not in the hands of the Arabs," he said.

He added that the summit's goal was to point out that military strikes are not the means to enforce compliance with U.N. Security Council resolutions.

The result of the strikes, he said, "is that Saddam Hussein has gained more popularity in the Arab World."

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## Humanitarian programme set back

### 260,000 tonnes of rice destroyed

BAGHDAD (AP) — U.S. and British air strikes disrupted the distribution of supplies under the U.N.-approved oil-for-food programme, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator in Iraq said Monday.

The coordinator, Hans von Sponeck, also confirmed an earlier report that a U.N. warehouse full of rice was destroyed and said it was in the city of Tikrit.

Tikrit, the hometown of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, is 170 kilometres north of Baghdad.

The warehouse, managed by the U.N. World Food

Programme, held 260,000 tonnes of rice.

Von Sponeck told Associated Press Television News that "our programme has been severely curtailed."

More than 100 U.N. aid workers were evacuated last Friday to Amman, but U.N. officials said they would return to Iraq on Tuesday.

Those workers — along with about 30 "essential staff" who stayed in Baghdad — supervised the oil-for-food programme.

The programme, which is an exception to U.N. sanctions imposed after Iraq's

1990 invasion of Kuwait, allows Iraq to sell limited quantities of oil to buy needed food and medicine for its 22 million people.

Oil continued to flow during the bombardment, both U.N. and Iraqi officials said. But the arrival of food was disrupted because monitors were not in place.

Also Monday, the U.N. Children's Fund, UNICEF, said in a statement that it has drawn up plans to repair some of the buildings in Baghdad that were damaged during the airstrikes.

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## Russian envoy to return to U.S. soon

MOSCOW (AFP) — Russian ambassadors withdrawn from Washington and London in protest at Anglo-American airstrikes against Iraq will return to their posts soon, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported Monday.

Russia's long-serving U.S. ambassador, Yuli Vorontsov, and his counterpart in London Yuri Fokin were recalled last week at the height of the Iraq crisis.

However, citing highly-placed foreign ministry sources, the news agency said the two envoys would

return to the U.S. and British capitals "in the coming days." It did not elaborate.

A spokesman for the Russian foreign ministry said he could not confirm the report, and the U.S. and British embassies here said they had no information about the ambassadors' mooted return.

Russia, not consulted over the U.S.-British air strikes which it had vehemently opposed, had never before ordered its Washington ambassador to pull out in this way.

## Government manages to walk tightrope in Iraq crisis

By Alia A. Toukan

AMMAN — For now, Jordan can breathe a sigh of relief that the latest air strikes on Iraq are over. But some officials fear that the Iraqi problem could soon resurface, forcing the government, once again, to tread a delicate line between its official neutral position, and the country's pro-Iraq sentiments.

Following the end of the four-day U.S.-British air strikes against Iraq, Jordanians have begun assessing the Kingdom's policy towards the latest crisis. Although many analysts have

given the government a "thumbs up" for its handling of domestic opposition to the air strikes, lawmakers as well as prominent politicians and writers, have criticised it for not throwing its weight behind Iraq.

In a heated Lower House of Parliament debate on Sunday, spearheaded by the speaker of the house, Abdul Hadi Majali, the government came under heavy fire for what deputies described as its fence-sitting strategy.

One deputy after another took to the podium to condemn the attack, and demand retaliatory diplomatic action against Wash-

ington, London, and Israel.

The Kingdom should unilaterally lift the economic sanctions against Iraq, demanded several deputies — but impossible for Jordan considering it would mean violating an international-sanctioned embargo.

Jordan's support for the Iraqi people, at both the official and the popular level, remains iron-clad, despite strained ties between Amman and Baghdad, and the Kingdom's close links with Washington.

But the parliamentary debate was significant in that it highlighted the wide gap between

government policy and public sentiment, say analysts. But in stark contrast to the 1990-91 Gulf War, the general public appeared more subdued this time.

The recent air strikes, however, once again demonstrated Jordan's unenviable position. Faced by a Middle East peace process moving at a snail's pace, coupled with turmoil to the east of its border, Jordan is held hostage to the political winds of the region.

"Despite the sensitivity of our position between Iraq in the east and the Palestinians in the west, this country has been dealing with the situation in a way that

would minimise our losses and maximise our gains. This is a legitimate stance and a means of self-defence," Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh told parliament Sunday, responding to the deputies' attack.

Throughout the year, when two U.S. crises with Iraq were on the brink of erupting, and during the latest strike, Jordan made it clear that it was unwilling to set the clock back eight years when Amman's perceived pro-Iraq stand left it shunned by its Western and Gulf allies for years, and inflicted massive losses on the country's fragile economy.

Since the 1990-91 Gulf War, the Kingdom has shifted alliances, repaired its damaged ties with the west, distanced itself from the Iraqi regime, and made peace with Israel.

"Under these circumstances, we have done very well, and have matured with the eight-year-old crisis," remarked one official, requesting anonymity, adding that it would have proved difficult to maintain quiet domestic opposition if the strikes had resumed for much longer.

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## London continues campaign to regain support lost over Iraq

LONDON (AFP) — London on Monday continued its intensive campaign to regain international support lost over its decision to join four days of U.S. air and missile strikes on Iraq.

Foreign Secretary Robin Cook met his German counterpart Joschka Fischer, saying that he would spend the rest of the day in telephone talks with other European and Arab leaders and U.N. Security Council members.

After splitting from the international community and becoming the only nation to join the United States in attacking Iraq, Britain faces an uphill task in its attempts to build support for its strategy of diplomacy backed by the constant threat of ready force.

Prime Minister Tony Blair said Sunday that London and Washington's future strategy would be for tighter sanctions and isolation of Iraq — mediated by more effective aid for the Iraqi people and opposition — backed by the permanent threat of strikes.

This contrasts with calls around the world for a review of the U.N. sanctions in place since Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 and a reabsorption of Iraq into the international community.

"What I'll be seeking to do is to build the broadest possible consensus in the international community against Saddam, and making sure that he is as isolated as possible both in the international community and also among his own people," Cook told BBC radio.

Fischer, on the other hand, speaking after the meeting, pressed for the "reintegration" of Iraq, adding: "The priority needs to be humanitarian aid."

He added when Germany's six-month presidency of the 15-nation European Union began in January, Bonn would co-ordinate attempts to start a European initiative delivering aid to Baghdad.

While he did not directly criticise the U.S.-British strikes, he said he was "very happy" they were over.

"On the whole we will have to focus very much on creating a situation in which we need not return to the confrontation we have just seen," he said, although he repeated that Bonn thought Iraq brought the strikes on itself.

He further acknowledged that after talks with Cook and French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine creating EU unanimity on Iraq "will not be easy."

Cook tried to argue that Britain and the U.S. were themselves not as isolated as they appeared.

"The majority of the governments in the Arab World perfectly well understand that Saddam is trying to achieve that capacity for weapons of terror and that military machine to use against them," he told the BBC.

Later he said he had "absolute confidence that with the German government that we will be able to build a consensus to go ahead and build a strategy of containment of Saddam Hussein."

Cook said he agreed with the delivery of EU food and medicines "in the new few months" and proposed with Fischer an annual EU human rights report on Iraq.

Asked about French proposals for continued control of Iraqi arms combined with a review of sanctions and an improvement in living conditions for Iraqi citizens, Cook was dismissive in the earlier interview.

"If you go around Europe you'll find that there is an awful lot more support for the perspective that we have taken," he said.

But he welcomed France's determination to continue to work with London and Washington.

Cook also denied that London had lost face by launching the raids without any clear strategy for the post-strikes period, an accusation levelled in almost all British papers on Monday.

"We have had a diplomatic strategy ready for some time," he said. "You can't start that diplomatic campaign in the middle of military action."

The British intervention and the unstinting support given by Blair to Washington's headline stance raised hackles in Europe, coming only two weeks after a Franco-British agreement on joint military operations seen as a first step towards building an independent European defence force.

France criticised the raids launched without prior approval of the U.N. Security Council, and Italy expressed "regret" that Britain acted against Iraq without consulting EU partners. Fischer went as far as to argue for a lifting of sanctions.

Britain is facing criticism at home as well.

Calling off a truce observed while British forces were in action, Conservative foreign policy spokesman Michael Howard warned Monday of a developing "policy vacuum" and a lack of a diplomatic consensus which "does not bode well for the future."



A U.S. Harrier jet lands on board the USS Belleau-Wood sailing Monday in northern Gulf waters (AFP photo)

## 'Kuwait no party to war on Iraq'

KUWAIT CITY (AFP) — Kuwait is not involved in the hostilities against Iraq, the foreign minister said Monday, although British warplanes took off from bases in the sheikhdom where thousands of U.S. troops are deployed.

"We were not implicated although Kuwait has various agreements with a number of states," Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah told journalists.

He said other Gulf states

had similar agreements, meaning military cooperation accords with Western and Gulf countries.

"I assert once again that Kuwait is not a party in this affair," he said.

Last Friday, after the U.S.-British air war on Iraq began, the minister was first moved to deny any Kuwaiti role.

British Tornado fighter-bombers took off from Ali Al Saleh airport in Kuwait to carry out repeated air raids on

Iraq and several thousand U.S. troops are at Camp Doha.

American warplanes are at the Ali Al Jaber base, 80 kilometres south of Kuwait City, invaded by Saddam Hussein's troops in 1990, sparking the 1991 Gulf war.

Kuwait expressed hope the end of the air blitz will ease the suffering of the Iraqi people and lead to the implementation of U.N. resolutions on full Iraqi disarmament.

## Military success of Iraq bombing not clear — analysts

LONDON (AFP) — The military success of the four-day U.S.-British bombing blitz against Iraq is far from clear-cut, British military analysts said Monday.

Nick Cook, aviation editor at Jane's Defence Weekly, said that for all the dramatic military video pictures of bombs landing on buildings, Saddam Hussein's remaining arsenals of weapons of mass destruction may have escaped.

"It's impossible to know: as far as anyone's concerned all you could be hitting are empty buildings."

Cook said the Iraqis were "very adept" at moving their most powerful weapons out of harm's way despite the huge amount of high-technology spy equipment deployed against them.

"I'm sure they know exactly when an American spy satellite passes over. Obviously they know when a spy plane passes," he said. "There is not continuous coverage."

Although the primary justification for the biggest cruise missile attacks in history was eradicating the last elements of Iraq's once-extensive chemical and biological warfare programme, Cook said the post-bombing emphasis seemed to be falling on undermining Saddam's political base.

"It's notable that the targets they've been talking up are Saddam Hussein's power base," he said, listing the installations of the elite Republican Guard, the communications and the command and control networks.

"It would be interesting to see whether the actual bombing attacks are fol-

lowed up with rather more covert destabilisation techniques," Cook said, such as jamming of radio stations.

Neil Partrick, head of Middle East programmes at the Royal United Service Institute for Defence Studies, also said that Washington and London showed they wanted to put Saddam's power base "directly under pressure... so they might in the near-term future move against Saddam."

However, he said that even the success of this prong of the attack was surrounded by uncertainty since bombing the Republican Guards might in the end dissuade, rather than persuade them from mounting a coup.

"It's a bit like taking the rug away from the very people who you hope fervently may move against Saddam," he said.

Given this paradox, the U.S.-British leaders may be relieved that they were constrained by the start of the Holy Month of Ramadan and international pressure to keep the campaign short and therefore limit their punishment of the elite troops.

"If they had been as successful as claimed, they would be undermining the very people" they needed to overthrow Saddam, Partrick said. "It's a hard circle to square."

As with the attacks on sites suspected of links to weapons of mass destruction, the attacks on the Republican Guards and other security centres may also not have worked simply because "many of the key installations have been emptied," Partrick said.

## Arab TV station wins double Saddam scoop

By Habib Trabelsi  
Agence France Presse

DUBAI — President Saddam Hussein intervened twice publicly in the war on Iraq and both times he chose a satellite television based in Qatar with a growing reputation for defying orthodox Arab media values.

The Iraqi strongman clearly wanted to reach the widest Arab audience with his appeal Friday to his countrymen to resist the U.S.-British onslaught and a speech Sunday paying tribute to his people.

With his own two Iraqi stations silenced by the aerial blitz, he chose Al Jazeera, providing the station with exclusive taped messages.

"The American CNN and British BBC were also considered," said Al Jazeera's Director General Mohammed Jasssem. "Saddam preferred Al Jazeera for its credibility and wide

audience in the Arab World."

"Our station refuses to be any regime's propaganda instrument. It is open to any Arab leader," he stressed.

Al Jazeera is no stranger to controversy having provoked a series of official protests from Arab countries since it was launched in November 1996.

But it has ridden the storms taboo subjects have whipped up and today enjoys high ratings in the Arab World.

The Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU), set up through the Arab League, has refused to allow in Al Jazeera despite its official motto of "promoting brotherhood between Arab countries."

ASBU demanded, in the peculiar language employed in the Middle East when toeing the official line is required, that Al Jazeera confirm to

the "code of honour of the Arab media."

"I think that on the contrary Al Jazeera's joining would be an honour for the ASBU," said Jasssem. "The Arab people have acquired trust in Al Jazeera, despite the anger of some Arab governments," he said.

The channel's star programme called "The Opposite Meaning" has provided a tribune for opponents of many governments unused to hearing and not ready to accept differing views.

Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have all protested about the programme fronted by Syrian Faisal Al Qassem.

Even the U.S. embassy in Doha, capital of Qatar, made a strong protest after calls to strike American interests were made during the programme early this year when Washington was threatening Baghdad.

Qassem has been accused of being an agent for the Americans, Iraq, Israel and Syria.

"That proves I'm on the right path," Qassem told AFP.

A survey among journalists in the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Tunisia found that Qassem's programme was their favourite in the Arab World where official-speak is the order of the day.

"Is it contrary to this code of honour to discuss a point of view and the opposite of that point of view?" asked Deputy Director General Abdullah Al Hajj.

"I don't think any Arab regime has been as denigrated on Al Jazeera as Iraq," he noted. "We are trying to inform people in an objective way whether it pleases some people or not."

The Saddam scoops might be considered a just reward.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Annan 'hopeful' on anniversary

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — U.N. chief Kofi Annan expressed regret Monday that Libya had failed to hand over two suspects in time for the 10th anniversary of the Lockerbie bombing. But the U.N. chief, who held talks with Libyan President Moammar Qadhafi on Dec. 5, told reporters here he was "still hopeful that we will get a positive decision from the Libyan government."

Annun was asked whether he had a message for the families of the 270 victims of the Dec. 21, 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. He replied: "It's regrettable that 10 years after the event, we have not been able to get to the truth so they can put this behind them, mourn their dead and carry on with their lives."

**Envoys meet over Ocalan**  
ANKARA (AFP) — Italian and Turkish diplomats have met to discuss a way out of the crisis sparked by the arrest of Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan, the Anatolia news

agency reported Monday. One solution discussed at the meeting, in the Turkish embassy in Rome, was the expulsion of Ocalan to a third country agreed by Ankara and Rome, Anatolia said.

### Israel urged to release Syrian

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — One hundred French intellectuals have called on Israel to release a Syrian who has served 10 years of a 25-year sentence for plotting an attack against the Jewish state, his lawyer said on Monday. Yasser Moazzan was 17-years-old when he was captured in the "security zone" set up by Israel in southern Lebanon, his lawyer, Tamar Peleg, said. He was sentenced to 25 years in prison for planning to carry out an attack on Israel's territory, she said. Since August, he has been hospitalised for treatment of a serious kidney problem. In a petition sent to Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, the 100 French intellectuals said Moazzan was urgently in need of a kidney transplant.

### JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19

### PROGRAMME TWO

15:10 Children's French programme  
15:30 ...Carnon - Barone in Pygmas  
16:00 ...Doc - Life Choices  
16:30 ...Ch. 2 links with Ch. 1  
17:00 ...Doc - Mothers of the Wild  
18:15 ...Omar Ben Abdul Aziz  
19:00 ...Le Journal  
19:15 ...Words of Wisdom  
19:30 ...News headlines  
19:35 ...Comedy - Step by Step  
20:00 Journey Across the World of Islam  
20:30 ...Drama - Tom Jones  
21:05 Doc. - You and Your Car  
21:30 ...UN Cut  
22:00 ...News in English  
22:30 ...Lonesome Dove  
23:10 Feature film - "Stone, Scissors, Paper"  
00:30 ...End of T.X.

### PRAYER TIMES

05:05 ...Fajr  
06:27 ...Sunrise/Duha  
11:34 ...Dhuhr  
14:18 ...Asr  
16:41 ...Maghreb  
18:04 ...Isha

### CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church  
Sweifich Tel. 5920740  
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785  
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4634990  
Terra Sancta Church Tel.

## JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Temperatures are expected to rise slightly with winds southeasterly moderate. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate and seas calm.

Amman ..... 07/17  
Aqaba ..... 09/24  
Deserts ..... 05/20  
Jordan Valley ..... 11/24

Yesterday's high temperatures:  
Amman 15, Aqaba 22 Humidity readings: Amman 50 per cent, Aqaba 42 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun ..... 03/11  
Jerash ..... 10/18  
Um Qays ..... 06/17  
Madaba ..... 04/15  
Petra ..... 03/17  
Dead Sea ..... 12/25

### USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:  
Dr. Abdul Majid Al Shalhi ..... 4391405  
Dr. ..... Faldri  
Thayeh ..... 4915880  
Dr. Fakhri Bilal ..... 5222233  
Dr. Mazen Nhalil ..... 5390435

AMMAN:  
Firas Pharmacy ..... 5661912  
Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730  
Mayadah Pharmacy ..... 5337004  
Rakia Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID:  
Dr. Mohammad Al Shalhi 027100588  
Fou'ad Pharmacy 02725360

ZARQA:  
Dr. Zahoor Al Qadi 09906606  
Palestine Pharmacy 09983562

### EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre ..... 4637111  
Civil Defence Department 5661111  
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue ..... 4630341  
Civil Defence Emergency ..... 199  
Rescue Police 192, 4621111, 4637777  
Fire Brigade ..... 4617101  
Blood Bank ..... 4775121  
Highway Police ..... 5343402  
Traffic Police ..... 4896390  
Public Security Dept. 4630321  
Hotel Complaints ..... 5605800  
Price Complaints ..... 5661176  
Water & Sewerage Complaints 4897467  
Amman Municipality Complaints ..... 4787111  
Telephone Information (directory assistance) ..... 121  
Overseas Calls ..... 0132  
Central Amman Telephone Repairs ..... 4623101  
Abdali Tel. Repairs ..... 5661101

Jordan Television ..... 4773111  
Radio Jordan ..... 4774111  
Water Authority ..... 5680100  
J. Electricity Authority 5815615  
Electric Power Co. 4636381  
RJ Flight Information 44-53200  
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

### HOSPITALS

AMMAN:  
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery ..... 5921199  
The Islamic, Abdli ..... 56661317  
Husseini Medical Centre 5856836  
Luzmila ..... 4630195  
Khalidi Maternity ..... 46442816  
Akileh Maternity ..... 46424412  
Jabal Annon Maternity ..... 4643262  
Malhas, J. Amman ..... 4636140  
Palestine, Shmeisani ..... 5607071  
Shmeisani Hospital ..... 5607431  
Jordan Hospital ..... 5607550  
University Hospital ..... 5353444  
Al-Muasher Hospital 566722719  
Al-Ahli, Abdali ..... 56641646  
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 4777101/3  
Al-Bashir ..... 4775111/26  
Army, Marka ..... 4891611/15  
Queen Alia Hospital ..... 5157100  
Amal Hospital ..... 5607155  
Al Amal Cancer Centre 5353000

ZARQA:  
Zarqa Gov. Hospital 09983323  
Zarqa National Hospital 09900560  
Ibo Sina Hospital ..... 09986731  
Al Hikma Modern Hospital

IRBID:  
Princess Basma Hospital 0275555  
Roman Catholic Hospital ..... 0272275  
Ibn Al Nafies Hospital ..... 027101372, 0271013101  
Rosary Sisters Hospital ..... 027102831, 027102011  
Specialty Hospital ..... 027103100

FOR THE TRAVELLER  
QUEEN ALIA  
AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)55200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone 44 (52700). Information on Royal Wings flights can be supplied on phone 4875201-5

### ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights  
05:50 ..... Tehran (RJ)  
06:40 ..... Samaa (RJ)  
07:30 ..... Damascus (RJ)  
09:25 ..... Abu Dhabi (RJ)  
10:05 ..... Muscat, Dubai (RJ)

10:15 ..... Doha, Bahrain (RJ)  
16:20 ..... Cairo (RJ)  
17:30 ..... London, Frankfurt (RJ)  
17:30 ..... Chicago, Amsterdam (RJ)  
21:10 New York, Amsterdam (add) (RJ)  
22:10 Bangkok, Sharjah (add) (RJ)  
23:10 ..... Beirut (RJ)  
01:25 ..... Tel Aviv (add) (RJ)  
04:00 ..... Jeddah (add) (RJ)

Other Flights  
12:30 ..... Aden (TY)  
14:35 ..... Istanbul (TK)  
18:00 ..... Dubai, Damascus (EK)  
18:40 ..... Beirut (ME)  
18:45 ..... Kiev (6U)  
19:05 ..... Paris (AF)  
20:25 ..... Tel Aviv (LY)  
20:40 ..... Cairo (MS)  
22:25 ..... London, Damascus (BA)  
23:35 ..... Amsterdam (KL)  
23:55 ..... Larnaca (CY)  
00:55 ..... Bucharest (RO)  
02:00 ..... Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights  
09:30 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)  
11:10 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)  
16:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)  
18:45 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)  
22:50 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)

### DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights  
08:25 ..... Amsterdam, New York (RJ)  
10:50 ..... Berlin, Brussels (RJ)  
11:05 ..... Vienna, Frankfurt (RJ)  
12:00 ..... Geneva, Madrid (RJ)  
12:10 ..... Paris (RJ)  
12:15 ..... London (RJ)  
12:30 ..... Cairo (RJ)  
19:35 ..... Beirut (RJ)  
20:30 ..... Jeddah (RJ)  
21:00 ..... Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)  
23:00 ..... Jeddah (add) (RJ)  
23:10 ..... Tel Aviv (add) (RJ)  
00:40 ..... Damascus (RJ)

Other Flights  
07:10 ..... Frankfurt (LH)  
13:30 ..... Aden (TY)  
15:35 ..... Istanbul (TK)  
19:00 ..... Dubai (EK)  
19:40 ..... Kiev (6U)  
20:00 ..... Beirut (ME)  
21:10 ..... Tel Aviv (LY)  
21:40 ..... Cairo (MS)  
00:35 ..... Amsterdam (KL)  
01:55 ..... Bucharest (RO)  
03:00 ..... Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights  
07:00 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)  
08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)  
16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)  
20:30 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

### WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology





Members of the Lower House National Guidance Committee meet Monday with Information Minister Nasser Judeh (Petra photo)

## House committee asks that official media serve as public forum

AMMAN (Petra) — The Lower House's National Guidance Committee Monday requested that the official media serve as a forum for the public to express their views on issues of concern to the nation.

The committee also asked that media affiliated with the Information Ministry play a leading role in safeguarding the country's traditions, help enhance the sense of national belonging among the Jordanian public and reflect the country's policies and its bright image before the world, the committee's chairperson, Rafi Haddad, said.

Speaking at a meeting attended by Information Minister Nasser Judeh and heads of official information departments, Haddad said the committee demanded that Parliament and the government

intensify their efforts to develop journalism and the media profession and upgrade the work of the country's official information services in a manner that would reflect the credibility of the Kingdom and its achievements and help highlight Jordan's role within the Arab and international communities.

The committee asked that national cultural and artistic production be supported by allowing such activities to be presented through official media outlets, Haddad added.

He said the committee requested that the official media be the main source for all credible information and reflect the Jordanian public's feelings and views.

Judeh told the committee that the government is concerned with maintaining cooperation among the com-

mittee, Parliament and the press in a bid to help the media better serve the nation. The minister said that the government is concerned with the enforcement of the Press and Publications Law but in a flexible manner, as it strives to maintain a good level of cooperation with the press.

He said the government is following a policy of dialogue with the various media services and the press because the media reflects the country's political position.

Judeh also noted that the Information Ministry has concluded an agreement with the Jordan Press Association on referring issues connected with the application of the press' code of honour to the JPA to deal with them through its disciplinary council.

## House requests Arab Parliamentary Union meeting to discuss attacks on Iraq

AMMAN (Petra) — The Lower House of Parliament on Monday called for an emergency meeting of the Arab Parliamentary Union to discuss the U.S.-U.K. attacks on Iraq, which the House described as a dangerous precedent that violated the U.N. Charter and international law.

"The Lower House has followed with deep pain and concern the flagrant U.S.-British aggression against Iraq, which resulted in the destruction of numerous military and civilian installations and caused the death and injury of innocent people," said a House statement.

"The U.S.-British attack was based on UNSCOM's report, which was viewed with criticism and suspicion by various governments and organiza-

tions in the West who described it as lacking integrity and serving the U.S. administration's purposes," the statement added.

It said the attacks, launched on Iraq against the will of the U.N., the majority of the Security Council members and the world community, have created a very dangerous precedent that will encourage other nations to launch similar attacks on other countries at will.

"It is unacceptable to see the U.S. leading the Middle East peace process while at the same time leading acts of aggression against a country in the same region," noted the statement.

Calling for an end to a double-standards policy concerning the elimination of mass

destruction weapons, the House said this principle should be applied to all parties through peaceful dialogue and agreements to enable the region to enjoy real peace and security.

While urging the world community to prevent similar acts in the future, the statement voiced appreciation of the stand of the Russian and Chinese governments and parliaments, who supported a peaceful solution to the crisis.

"The Lower House of Parliament has decided that the sanctions on Iraq should be broken and calls on the government to carry out this decision and all other Arab states to follow suit. The House calls on Arab countries to hold an emergency summit meeting to help restore solidarity among Arab states

and confront U.S. attempts to impose its hegemony on the Arab Nation."

"At the same time, the House calls for an extraordinary meeting of the Arab Parliamentary Union to discuss the attacks against Iraq and adopt a unified stand in the face of this aggression," the statement said.

House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali sent a copy of the statement to APU President Ahmad Fathi Srour, noting that the emergency meeting requested could be held in any Arab capital.

Writers group stages sit-in to protest attacks

Also on Monday, the Jordan Writers Association staged a sit-in at the association's

offices in Amman to protest the American-British attacks on Iraq.

After a minute of silence in honour of the victims of the air strikes, several speakers delivered addresses expressing solidarity with the Iraqi people and calling for the collection of donations to be sent to Iraq by a delegation representing the association.

The association issued a statement condemning the attack as a barbaric act of aggression against the Arab people.

A major public rally was held in the city of Salt in the Balqa governorate during which speakers denounced the U.S.-British attacks and called for the lifting of the sanctions that have been on Iraq for the past eight years.

## Envoys offer differing views of EU success in Mideast

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — European envoys in Amman on Monday showed signs of disharmony when it came to presenting their views on areas in which the EU has or has not made achievements in the Middle East.

At a press conference ahead of the passing of the gavel of the rotating European Union presidency, the ambassadors representing the EU troika — the current, former, and future presidents of the EU — agreed that their economic role has been successful, but saw their political role in different lights.

For Austrian Ambassador Philipp Hoyos, whose country currently holds the presidency, the EU political role in the Middle East peace process could have been more prominent.

"The EU played an active role in its relations with the Middle East in the economic fields, but we would like to play a political role in the peace process," Hoyos said. "But the conditions were not in our favour, therefore we were not able to do so," he said.

Supporting his diplomatic colleague's position, German Ambassador Peter Mende said his country would do its

utmost to back the ongoing peace process and to further cement European Union links when Germany takes over the presidency in January.

"It goes without saying that the old European role should be changed, but we will try, during the German presidency, to enlarge the political role of Europe,"

But he stressed the EU's "firm position" saying that "we stand by the legitimate right of the Palestinians to self-determination, as well as the security of Israel."

But British Ambassador Christopher Bartscombe, whose country presided over the EU presidency from January to June 1998, said he believed Europe indeed played an active role, particularly with regard to the work of special EU Envoy to the Middle East Miguel Moratinos, but in a complimentary manner.

"I think we do have a significant role, but the Americans remain in the lead, and our role is a supporting one," said Bartscombe.

He said that the EU has been working in "practical ways, like security cooperation with the Palestinians, helping in the establishment of the new airport in Gaza, and on several other issues."

In representing the countries

of the EU, Mende emphasised, the international body represents the citizens of member states. Therefore, he explained, the EU has to take decisions that are understandable to their citizens: peace abroad, security at home and economic prosperity with a guarantee of high levels of employment.

"Europe has an interest and responsibilities in the Middle East region, so we would like to take our share of the whole process," the German ambassador said.

Saying there are "several issues between the EU and the Middle East in which the member states will continue to work on in all dimensions," Mende cited as an example that "the EU may also acquire a particular role in supporting the preparation and observation of the elections in the Palestinian territories."

"We also believe that Jordan is a very active partner, therefore we have to consider all its problems, the refugee problem being one of the main issues," he said.

Jordan signed an EU-Jordan partnership agreement in Brussels at the end of 1997, and also engaged during the last few years in several Euro-Mediterranean dialogues, which concentrated on economic, political, security,

social and cultural issues.

Turning to the issue of Iraq and the reasons the EU is divided on the role it should take in solving the eight-year old crisis, as well as factors for not applying the same strategy to the Iraq problem as it does to the peace process by appointing a special envoy to Baghdad, the envoys leaned on the United Nations.

"The Iraq crisis or question is not part of the EU policy, but it is part of the U.N. and the Security Council policies," the German ambassador said.

Bartscombe, whose country was part of the U.S.-U.K. alliance that launched the latest military strikes against Iraq, added: "Iraq has been mainly managed through the U.N. Security Council, which has several European countries represented, but not an EU representative."

Veering from presenting the EU's position on Iraq and offering instead his country's national stand, Mende stressed that Germany hopes "that the Security Council is able to recover a common stand towards Iraq."

"We would like to see Iraq return to the international community after it fulfils the Security Council resolutions," Mende added.

As for differences on the

Iraq issue within the European countries, mainly France, Bartscombe said that "there was a great deal of exaggeration... Of course, a lot of people are concerned about the result of the use of force. We took the decision [to strike] extremely reluctantly, but in the end, we saw no alternative but to use force, which has been limited strictly to military targets," the British ambassador said.

"But I can assure you that there is not a great difference between us and the French in our attitude towards dealing with Iraq... we both take the threats from Iraq seriously," he added.

Stressing the importance of UNSCOM's role in Iraq, Bartscombe said: "We would like to see some form of an UNSCOM, or something like it going back into Iraq... because if sanctions are to be lifted, that requires someone to verify that the weapons of mass destruction have been dealt with, and [that] Iraq has complied with the U.N. Security Council resolutions."

"We hope that in the future Iraq will be prepared to cooperate with the U.N. and to enable UNSCOM to do its work, and to verify or monitor that the Iraqis are complying with their obligations," the British ambassador added.

## Ad hoc committee to request changes to pharmacists law

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — A special committee formed to look into ways of curbing the increasing number of pharmacies in the Kingdom will refer its recommendations on introducing new articles to the pharmacists law to the health minister today, a pharmacists union official said yesterday.

The recommendations include issuing pharmacy licences in the Amman area only to individuals who are graduates in pharmaceutical sciences with at least five years' working experience, said Talal Albo, secretary general of the Jordan Pharmacists Association.

As for the rest of the country, Albo said the recommendations set the minimum experience to open a pharmacy at four years for governorates and three for districts, with no minimum experience for rural areas.

Another measure stipulates that any pharmacist who sells his/her pharmacy will be considered as having

no experience if he/she later applies for a licence to open a new pharmacy. The applicant will have to work as a pharmacist to regain the required experience to open a new pharmacy, said Albo.

Jordan has one of the highest pharmacy-population ratios in the world, said Albo.

"Since approximately 65 per cent of Kingdom's population receives its medicine from the Health Ministry or military or university hospitals, the 1,600 pharmacies currently operating across the Kingdom must compete for the remaining 35 per cent of the market," Albo told the Jordan Times earlier.

"This has led to a situation where there are barely 1,000 people per pharmacy in Jordan, compared to the world average of about one pharmacy per 5,500 citizens," he added.

Albo said the pharmacists' situation is further compounded by an expected tenfold increase in the number of pharmaceutical science

graduates in the coming years. Jordanian universities graduate an average of 100-200 pharmacists a year, but the number of universities offering majors in pharmaceutical sciences will increase from three to seven within the coming next two years.

Albo said an amendment has been recommended concerning the distance between pharmacies in commercial and residential areas. It stipulates that the minimum distance between one pharmacy and another in a commercial area must exceed 150 metres instead of the current 40 metres, while in residential areas the distance must exceed 250 metres instead of 150 metres.

The recommendation states that the size of any pharmacy should be 40 square metres instead of the current 32 square metres, added Albo.

The committee comprises officials from the Health Ministry and the Jordan Pharmacists Association.

## Staff of Gulf returnees compensation bureau begin strike

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — The staff of a bureau in charge of seeking U.N. compensation for Jordanians forced to flee Kuwait after the 1990 Gulf crisis Monday began an open-ended strike, bureau officials said.

The 13 men and women employed at the bureau launched the strike to protest what they said was the Labour Ministry's five-year-long interference in the office's operations and to press for a clear budget to ensure its continued operations, they added.

The near-penniless non-governmental organisation has been working with a bare mini-

mum of funds for the last two years because the government has failed to earmark allocations for its operations, they said.

The Labour Ministry and the NGO have been engaged in a dispute for years over who has the right to seek compensation claims for the more than 300,000 Jordanian returnees, many of whom are of Palestinian origin and have no past records of personal identification on file in Amman.

Labour Ministry officials could not be reached for comment. Meanwhile, Yahya Utaihi, head of the bureau, declined to disclose any information on the

strike, saying the action had taken him by surprise as he had just come back from a 17-day trip to Switzerland for talks with the Geneva-based U.N. Compensation Committee.

But Khaled Hamdan, vice president of a committee of Jordanian investors seeking U.N. compensation through the bureau, said the strike would hit the investors hardest as it will paralyse all communications with the United Nations.

This, in turn, would further postpone hefty compensation requests made by 1,706 returnees from the U.N., already delayed because some ministry and NGO workers "provided some incomplete

information on 1,365 requests," according to Hamdan.

The 1,706 returnees, seeking compensation estimated at \$1.6 billion, are among the last to receive their dues from the U.N. fund, whose revenues come from limited Iraqi oil sales under the oil-for-food deal approved by the United Nations in 1996.

Many of the other Jordanian returnees have already been compensated by the fund, including those who incurred losses, some of which were over \$100,000, because of the crisis, sparked by Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Hamdan, who is seeking \$14.5 million himself, claimed

that red tape was holding up around \$500,000 in interest on \$125 million transferred by the U.N. fund to the government months ago while the NGO did not have money to "buy pens and pencils."

Many of the returnees, including affluent businessmen, Kuwait government employees, teachers and bankers, were forced to flee Kuwait after Iraq's invasion. Others were evicted by Kuwait after the U.S.-led military forces liberated the emirate.

Hamdan said the committee of investors would seek help from officials in solving the running dispute between the NGO and the government.

## Voluntary groups organise meals for needy during Ramadan

AMMAN (J.T.) — Since the start of the Holy Month of Ramadan, Jordanian charitable voluntary organisations and benefactors have been organising free meals for the needy in various parts of the country.

The food offered as iftar (the meal to break the day's fast) is usually sent to mosques and Islamic centres for the ben-

efit of the poor and is open to the public free of charge throughout the whole month.

In Zarqa, one of these organisations, Al Rahman Food Society, offered meals to around 500 needy people at Omar Ben Al Khatib Mosque on Sunday.

In Amman, the Rotary Club (western Amman) distributed iftar food to

orphans cared for by the Um Al Hussein Orphanage.

The iftar, held in cooperation with the Hard Rock Cafe, was attended by nearly 140 orphaned children.

A Rotary spokesperson said the club was preparing to distribute gifts to the needy in Amman as well as poor districts in other parts of the country.

## what's going on

THE NIGHTS OF RAMADAN FESTIVAL

\* French film "L'Age des possibles" (sponsored by the French Cultural Centre) at Cinema Philadelphia at 8:00 p.m.

\* French film "Nelly et M. Arnaud" (sponsored by the French Cultural Centre) at Cinema Philadelphia on Wednesday Dec. 23 at 8:00 p.m.

### EXHIBITIONS

\* Exhibition of ceramics, sculpture, and abstract (plastic) art by Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese, and Sudanese artists at Hammouri Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until Jan. 25.

\* Exhibition of Nabatean silver jewelry at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre, off Wadi Sagra Street, until Dec. 31 (Tel. 5699141/2).

\* "The Warm Winter" — works by several artists at Orfali Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 1.

\* The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2), until Jan. 28.

## UNDP awards local organisations \$100,000 for environmental projects

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — The United Nations Development Programme Monday awarded \$100,000 to four local grassroots projects designed to tackle a range of environmental problems.

At a ceremony, the grants were presented to four Jordanian non-governmental organisations operating under the UNDP's Small Grants Programme, which seeks to help households and communities combat climate change, land degradation and desertification as well as threats to biodiversity and international waters by applying local solutions.

Financed by the New York-based Global Environment Facility, a funding arm mobilised at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the Small Grants Programme gives high priority to environmental initiatives that involve youth and women. Two of

the four grant recipients were youth groups whose projects aim to prevent land degradation and educate young Jordanians on global environmental problems, a UNDP statement said.

Using palm seedlings provided by the Agriculture Ministry, the Damia Social Youth Club's project will plant palm trees in the village of Damia along the Jordan River.

The Jordan Valley Authority plans to extend the community irrigation system to include the village, located in the south of the country, and the local municipality has agreed to undertake the preparation of land for planting.

The project is expected to create jobs for Damia residents and serve as a model for sustainable land use for other landowners in the area. The Science and Technology Club, an NGO which works with youth, plans to

use its grant to establish a research lab for practical applications to raise awareness among young Jordanians on global environmental issues. The club is a previous recipient of GEF grants, which were used to form a Nature Appreciation Centre for schools and youth groups across Jordan.

The Middle East division of Birdlife International designed an initiative to monitor and protect 17 important bird habitats — several of which have been recognised internationally — covering about 9.5 per cent of Jordan's land area. The project aims to address the threat of extinction facing bird species as well as local and migratory wildlife as a result of environmental degradation.

The Mukheibeh Development Society, a previous recipient which established a palm tree nursery with a pilot phase grant, plans to use its

second grant on training in the village of Mukheibeh, which sits on the border of Jordan, Syria and Israel. The local community will learn watershed management techniques that will allow them to cultivate land without polluting or depleting nearby water resources.

The GEF Small Grants Programme was launched in Jordan by the UNDP in 1992. Earlier this year, six NGOs, the majority of which were women's groups, received grants to address desertification and land degradation — among Jordan's most pressing environmental problems.

To date, the Small Grants Programme has funded 32 projects at a total cost of \$1 million. Jordan is among five Arab countries that have benefited from the programme since its establishment. Other small grant recipients in the region include the Palestinian National Authority, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia.



## China sentences dissident to 13 years in half-day trial

BEIJING (AP) — Underlining the government's resolve to crush dissent, a Chinese court Monday sentenced a prominent dissident to 13 years in prison, accusing him of trying to subvert state power by organising an opposition party, his lawyer said.

The harsh sentence for Xu Wenli came at the end of a 3 1/2 hour trial, said court-appointed lawyer Mo Shaoping.

The trial was conducted in secrecy amid extremely tight security. Xu's wife, who was told of the trial only late Friday, was the only person among his family and supporters allowed to attend.

During the trial, Xu refused to reply to any questions posed by the prosecutors and judges and responded only to questions from his own lawyer. "Xu Wenli said he won't appeal. He said this is political persecution," Mo said.

Xu's conviction deprives the nascent China Democracy Party of a potent organiser and a moderate voice. He is the most influential dissident leader to have been tried in a three-week campaign that has seen at least 32 members detained or questioned.

Xu, 55, was convicted of subversion for his role in organising the party and thereby challenging the ruling Communist Party. His sentence is just slightly shorter than that given to fellow activist Wei Jingsheng, who was sentenced to 14 years in prison in 1995, also allegedly for trying to subvert the government. Wei was released on medical parole in November 1997 on condition he go into exile.

During Monday morning's trial, uniformed and plainclothes police cordoned off the Beijing Intermediate Court in the

city's western suburbs, preventing journalists and other bystanders from approaching within 500 metres. Court officials contacted by telephone declined to comment on the case.

Asked the reason for the tight controls, one police officer said "state security." Chinese in the neighbourhood were surprised by the police presence and said they didn't know about the trial or Xu.

"Chinese people aren't allowed to know what's going on and foreign reporters aren't allowed to go in. This is democracy," said a local resident, who gave only his surname, Zhang.

Three plainclothes police equipped with radios followed Xu's wife, He Xintong, as she, spurning a police offer to drive her to the court, took the subway.

To prevent supporters from rallying outside the court, police detained two of Xu's colleagues Sunday and kept watch on the homes of at least two others, friends and a Hong Kong-based rights group reported.

As it was rounding up Xu's friends, China Sunday released into exile a prominent labour rights campaigner in what appeared to be an attempt to blunt international criticism of the trial.

Liu Nianchun was taken from a prison camp outside Beijing and, with his wife and daughter, was put on a plane to Canada and then New York, his first taste of freedom in more than 3 1/2 years.

Authorities released Liu on medical parole five months before the end of his sentence provided he go abroad, said his brother, exiled democracy campaigner Liu Qing.

Over the past two years, as China tried to woo the West, Beijing signed two key U.N. rights treaties and won praise for bringing its spotty legal system closer to international standards. The ruling Communist Party relaxed some controls on dissenting views among academics.

Xu Wenli and other dissidents saw opportunity in the more open atmosphere and tried to use Chinese laws to set up and register the China Democracy Party. To wipe out the opposition movement, authorities have violated recently revised laws intended to protect the rights of criminal suspects. They rushed Xu and fellow leader Qin Yongmin to trial with less than four days' notice to their families, instead of the required 10.

After authorities scared away prospective lawyers, Qin and a third principal organiser, Wang Youcai, were forced to argue their own cases in trials held last Thursday. No verdicts have been announced.

The Beijing court appointed a Xu a lawyer, but his wife said it was a formality. "He hasn't even read the whole indictment. How is he going to represent my husband?" He Xintong said.

Xu edited a dissident journal in the Democracy Wall movement 20 years ago and spent 12 years in prison, mostly in solitary confinement. Since his parole ended last year, he played the role of elder adviser to other dissidents.

He became openly involved in the China Democracy Party in November, organising the group's branch in Beijing and nearby Tianjin. Shortly before his arrest, he called on party members and exiled dissidents to convene a nationwide congress.

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Pro-democracy activist and legislative councillor Leung Yiu-Chung holds a portrait of veteran Chinese dissident Xu Wenli during a demonstration at the government headquarters in Hong Kong. A group protested after a Chinese court sentenced Xu to 13 years in prison for subversion after a trial that lasted just a few hours (Reuters photo)

## Wei Jingsheng calls for mutual support at start of Taiwan visit

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Exiled Chinese dissident Wei Jingsheng arrived in Taiwan Monday, saying he looked forward to witnessing the island's freedoms first hand and urging Taiwanese to support the democracy movement in mainland China.

"We hope to meet with (Taiwanese) leaders from all sides, to see, to talk and to exchange views on the full range of topics," Wei told reporters on arrival at Taipei's Chiang Kai-Shek International Airport.

"For everyone involved, information received through direct contacts is surely more accurate than news overheard."

Wei said he hoped for wide ranging discussions on human rights in Asia and would encourage mutual support of human rights campaigns in China and throughout the region.

During his nine day visit, Wei

will be received by top government officials, including President Lee Teng-hui and Premier Vincent Siew, along with officials of the ruling Nationalist Party.

He was quoted by a newspaper published Sunday as saying he would discuss assistance and funding with people in Taiwan, but wouldn't accept political conditions attached in any such aid.

Wei's first-ever visit here highlights Taiwan's calls for more democracy in China, as well as the sensitive relationship between Taipei and Beijing, which split politically amid civil war in 1949.

The Nationalists say Taiwan's peaceful transition to democracy over the last decade should be a model for China, which in size, population, and development challenges, dwarfs this newly-affluent island of 21 million people.

They say reunification

between the sides can only happen after China democratises, though many in the overseas Chinese democracy movement have accused Taiwan of failing to back up its rhetoric with substantive support.

While Wei embraces calls for democracy in China, he will likely speak cautiously about Taiwan's drive for a higher international profile that China considers tantamount to secession — a charge far more serious than advocating democracy.

Wei will also meet heads of the opposition New Party, which backs reunification with China, and the Democratic Progressive Party, which calls for Taiwan's formal and permanent independence from China.

Wei, who was released from a Chinese prison after 18 years in prison off-and-on, is visiting at the invitation of the private World League for Freedom and Democracy.

## Balloon team denied permission to fly over China

LONDON (AP) — British tycoon Richard Branson and his crew skirted the Himalayas Monday, but encountered a new obstacle in their quest to circle the globe in a balloon when China abruptly denied them permission to fly over its territory.

It was the second time politics threatened to derail the voyage. Libya also unexpectedly denied permission, but backed down at the last moment Saturday.

Branson and the ground crew of ICO Global, a mobile telephone company that is supporting the trip, were scrambling to persuade the Chinese to reverse the decision.

The Virgin boss, Chicago millionaire Steve Fossett and teammate Per Lind were flying along the Himalaya mountain range Monday morning on their way towards China.

The team reached the towering mountain range shortly after dawn and were expected to fly over the top of the Himalayas, catching sight of Everest and K2 on the way.

Weather conditions can deteriorate rapidly in the Himalayas, however, and gusts of warm air from below can prove a formidable challenge to balloonists.

The 82-metre balloon reached the Himalayas after a quiet day Sunday crossing Turkmenistan in Central Asia and flying over Afghanistan.

Over the weekend, the team had faced fierce thunderstorms and was forced to pass through a narrow corridor in the Caucasus to avoid flying over Iraq, Iran and Russia, which had denied the crew the right to use their airspace.

Branson and Lindstrand both broke their personal duration records of 48 hours in a hot air balloon during a 1991 crossing of the Pacific.

Fossett has made four tries to ring the globe. Branson has tried, and failed, four times to become the first person to circle the world in a balloon.

Improved technology has been used to make the balloon, including a canopy of Kevlar of the kind used for bulletproof

vests that covers the canopy over the crew's pressurised capsule.

The crew members, all of whom are wearing silver jumpsuits, estimate the trip could last from eight days to nearly three weeks.

They hope to touch down somewhere in western Europe at the end of a 62,000 kms flight, which will take them over India, the South China Sea, the Pacific and the United States.

The plan is to cross San Francisco on Christmas Day, with a goal of reaching Europe by New Year's.

The team secured permission from 97 countries for overflights and initially had only four refusals — Iran, Iraq, Russia and North Korea.

At least three other crews have been waiting for favourable weather to launch balloons — from Albuquerque, New Mexico, Loves Park, Illinois, and the Swiss Alps. Yet another team plans to take off next month from Alice Springs, Australia.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### 'Impeachment issue should be resolved quickly'

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australian Prime Minister John Howard called Monday for a speedy resolution to the impeachment proceedings against U.S. President Bill Clinton. But Howard said he would not take sides in what was a "domestic political contest between a Democratic president and a Democratic White House and the House of Representatives." "The only observation I would make is that the constitutional processes of the United States are very different from ours and they do throw up this extraordinary situation where you can have a president's authority under challenge in the most fundamental of ways for a period of months," Howard said in a radio interview. "I can only express the hope that the issue is resolved as speedily and effectively as possible." Howard said his dealings with Clinton had been positive. "As far as the relationship (between Australia and the United States) is concerned, he has been a good president. As far as his leadership in foreign affairs issues are concerned, I think he has been an effective president and there's little doubt that the American economy during his presidency has prospered very strongly," Howard said. "Peoples' private lives should be off limits except where there was a clear demonstration that private issues were impinging on the performance of their public duties. I think there has to be a clear dividing line between the two," he said.

### Congressman's campaign HQ damaged by arson fire

FARMINGTON HILLS, Michigan (AP) — An arson fire damaged U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg's campaign headquarters Sunday, and police are investigating whether it was revenge for his votes on impeachment. "If it is determined that this was retaliation of some sort because of Knollenberg's position yesterday, there could be a domestic terrorism charge," said Police Chief William Dwyer. No one was injured, and the office suffered minor fire and smoke damage, Dwyer said. The fire was started with plywood political signs. Knollenberg, a Republican, voted for all four articles of impeachment against President Bill Clinton Saturday. He said his office received hundreds of calls concerning the impeachment and the attack on Iraq last week. Dwyer said witnesses provided a possible vehicle description and suspect information.

### Chinese police seize 207kg of heroin

BEIJING (AP) — Authorities arrested two men and confiscated 207 kilograms of heroin in one of China's largest drug busts this year, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported Monday. Police discovered 384 packages of heroin during a search of a cargo truck in southern China's Guangxi province on Nov. 24, the report said. It was the largest haul of heroin found in Guangxi since Communist China was founded in 1949 and the third largest drug bust in the country this year, the report said without providing further details. Guangxi is adjacent to Yunnan province, which borders major South Eastern Asian drug production areas and is a key drug trafficking route.

### Singapore's American Club evacuated after bomb threat

SINGAPORE (AP) — A club for American expatriates in Singapore was evacuated and the U.S. embassy was searched Monday after an anonymous bomb threat, an embassy spokesman said. No bombs were found in either location. The embassy received a non-specific threat against Americans by phone around noon, said the embassy spokesman. Singapore authorities were notified immediately and a search of the embassy was conducted, the spokesman said. No bombs were found and the embassy was declared safe at 1:15 p.m., he said. Security personnel at the American Club, a private facility for U.S. citizens that is also open to Singaporeans, said the club was evacuated and closed. Police conducted a search but found no bomb, they added. It was not known whether the bomb threat was connected with the recent U.S. military strikes against Iraq. U.S. Embassies around the world have heightened their security since the bombing started last week.

### Two killed, 30 injured in clashes in Bangladesh

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Rival political groups fought pitched battles with bombs and guns, killing two people and injuring at least 30 others in southern Bangladesh, police said Monday. The clashes took place Sunday between the student wings of the ruling Awami League party and the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party in the town of Feni, 128 kilometres southeast of Dhaka. Feni is an Awami League stronghold. Such political violence is common in Bangladesh. Witnesses said a group armed with bombs and guns attacked and ransacked the homes of local BNP leaders. Some of the homes were set on fire and the wife of one BNP leader was injured in the attack. The gunshots and explosions created panic. The local administration called in armed border guards to restore peace. Opposition supporters, meanwhile, used mosque loudspeakers to call for help, witnesses said, and then fighting broke out. Opposition activists ransacked and torched the houses of their rivals. Police confirmed 30 people were injured but did not say how many people had been arrested. One person each from the ruling and the opposition party was killed and 13 of the 30 injured were in critical condition, police said. All shops and businesses remained closed for the day Monday. Police reinforcements were called in from neighbouring towns.

### Nobel Prize winning biologist Sir Alan Hodgkin dies

LONDON (AP) — Nobel prize winning biologist Sir Alan Hodgkin has died aged 84, his family said Sunday. Hodgkin's daughter Rachel said her father died Sunday at his Cambridge, eastern England home, after a long illness. She did not give a cause of death. Hodgkin won the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1963 with fellow scientists Sir Andrew Huxley and Sir John Eccles after discovering the complex system of how nerve cells transmit electrical impulses from the skin to the brain and back again. "The problem was one that has haunted physiology for 100 years," the Nobel committee said at the time of the award. Hodgkin was born on Feb. 5 1914, and educated at Cambridge University. He halted his research into the nervous system at the onset of World War II, when he worked with other scientists to develop Britain's radar program. After the fall of Nazi Germany, Hodgkin investigated the ionic theory of how nerve cells send messages to the brain via an "electric cable" in the spinal cord. They conducted a series of ingenious and complex experiments on the nerve fibres of squids and frogs to discover how the human brain responded to nerve messages. Hodgkin's American father-in-law, Frederick Rous, won the same Nobel award three years later for discovering that some forms of leukaemia are caused by a virus. Hodgkin was knighted in 1972 and awarded the prestigious Order of Merit in 1973. He is survived by his wife, Marion, and four children.

## Mexican government blames year-old massacre on history

MEXICO CITY (AP) — A year after gunmen massacred 45 Indian villagers in southern Mexico, the federal attorney general's office has issued a report that blamed the slayings on local conflicts and said they were not politically motivated.

Attorney General Jorge Madrazo released a 153-page report detailing investigations into the Dec. 22, 1997, massacre in Acteal of 21 women, 15 children and nine men who sympathised with Chiapas state's Zapatista National Liberation Army.

"We found no political roots of the massacre," Deputy Attorney General Jose Luis Ramos Rivera said at a news conference Sunday.

Most of the suspects in the killings identified themselves as supporters of the ruling

Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, while the victims belonged to a group that sympathises with leftist Zapatista rebels.

The Zapatistas staged a brief armed uprising in Chiapas in January 1994, demanding greater democracy and Indian rights.

Peace talks between the government and rebels have been stalled since 1996, and clashes between the two sides have been frequent since then.

The deputy attorney general said there was no evidence the ruling party was aware of the massacre plans. The report also found no evidence of charges Mexico's army aided the armed group that committed the slaying.

Madrazo outlined three major causes of the massacre: a long history of religious and

economic conflicts among Indian communities in the region; the creation of a rebel-run town near Acteal where the Zapatista presence "radicalised" existing conflicts; and the absence of law and order in the area, which caused villagers to resort to vigilante justice.

Of 135 people arrested in the case, only one has been sentenced — a former state policeman sentenced to three years for his role in transporting arms used in the massacre.

The National Human Rights Commission charged last week that the government has failed to adequately punish those responsible and has not reformed the state police force or provided economic aid to the area.

as to the fact that they're alive."

Gomez and Pedro Julio Guevara were being held at the Federal Detention Centre in downtown Miami, and were scheduled to appear before a judge for a bail hearing early this week.

If they get charged in the deaths of the refugees, they could face the death penalty, if convicted. That's in keeping with a 1996 immigration law that calls for tougher penalties against alien smugglers.

Prosecutors hope that at least four of the seven refugees being held at Krome Detention Centre, a holding facility of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalisation Service, will eventually testify against the alleged smugglers.

## Search called off for 6 Cubans missing

MIAMI (AP) — The Coast Guard has suspended its search for six missing Cubans who fled their homeland on a crowded speedboat that capsized in a botched immigrant-smuggling attempt that killed eight others.

Federal authorities at the weekend charged two of the nine survivors — Francisco Gomez and Pedro Julio Guevara — with alien smuggling.

"We're going forward with the prosecution," Border Patrol Assistant Chief Daniel Geoghegan said Sunday.

Guevara, he said, already had been under investigation by his office's anti-smuggling task force "for a previous smuggling trip in July."

Eight bodies, all of middle-aged women, were retrieved from Atlantic waters off Elliott Key south of Miami

Friday; six more people were still missing when the search was called off late Saturday.

In addition to the men charged, seven others survived the trip from the island nation just 145 kilometres south of Key West, Florida.

Two of the survivors are children, ages 9 and 4, the son and niece of Guevara, according to reports Sunday in the Sun-Sentinel in Fort Lauderdale.

Federal authorities identified the survivors as Francisco Alberto Palazuelos, 34; Pedro Julio Jimenez, 35; Javier David Saez, 26; Barbara Rosendo, 28; Alexis Guevara, 30; Yael Guevara, 9; and Linelids Guevara, 4.

The search would not be resumed, Coast Guard Lieutenant John Pierce said, "unless we get further information on their whereabouts





**NEW DELHI, India (AP)**—Ties with military and nuclear customer India are strong, the prime minister of cash-strapped Russia said Monday at the official start of his New Delhi visit.

The partnership is "solid," it is based on mutual interests, on our common desire to live in a stable world," Yevgeny Primakov told reporters, according to a translation of his comments by TASS. He added that along with China, the two nations could form a powerful strategic triangle.

"India is a great power, and many things in the region and in the world in general depend on the policy pursued by India, China and Russia," he said.

He also reiterated Russian criticism of the U.S.-British bombing of Iraq, an opposition India strongly shares.

"Russia's attitude to the use of force in international relations bypassing the U.N. Security Council is very much negative," he said.

Primakov, who flew in Sunday, was welcomed with an honour guard at the presidential palace Monday morning ahead of a full day of meetings with Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and others.

Primakov's entourage included his Finance Minister Andrei Shapovalyants, Trade Minister Georgy Gabuniya and Justice Minister Pavel Krashenninnikov.

Later Monday, he was scheduled to sign seven agreements, including one on extending current military and technical cooperation through 2010.

India is a leading buyer of Russian arms and its

defence forces depend up to 80 per cent on Russian equipment and spares.

India also is building two nuclear reactors purchased from Russia in a \$2.6 billion contract. Both sides say the reactors are for energy purposes and cannot be used for military means — progress on the agreement came even after India's nuclear weapons tests in May angered Russia and other countries.

The sales represent a valuable source of hard currency and jobs for the financially struggling country. India signed a contract last week to buy 10 Sukhoi-30MKI fighter jets from Russia. The value of the contract was not disclosed, but an earlier deal for 10 Sukhoi-30MKIs was reportedly worth about \$350 million.

India and Russia will also

sign an extradition treaty and an agreement covering legal assistance in criminal matters to deal with terrorism, Indian officials say.

The economic agreements will seek to enhance cooperation in steel, power and telecommunication sectors. The two countries also will study the possibility of jointly undertaking oil exploration in the two countries and in Central Asian republics.

In September, Russia delivered the first of seven contracted cryogenic engines to India. The engines are crucial to the development of the geosynchronous satellite launch vehicle that would carry a 2,500 kilogramme communication satellite.

India plans to launch a satellite to a stationary point in an orbit high above the earth's surface in 1999.

**SAS**  
becomes  
first to pull  
out of Hong  
Kong's new  
airport

HONG KONG (AP) — An international airline said Monday it will end services to Hong Kong because of the economic downturn and higher operating costs in the Chinese territory's new airport are undercutting its profits.

Scandinavian Airlines System, which flies four times weekly to Hong Kong, will stop services on March 1, said Per Mollén, general manager in Hong Kong for the Stockholm, Sweden-based carrier.

It will become the first airline to pull out of Hong Kong since the U.S. \$20 million Chek Lap Kok airport opened in early July to a string of humiliating computer glitches affecting passenger flights and cargo handling.

Services have been back to normal, but airline officials have been complaining about the steep landing and parking charges — about 20 per cent higher than before.

Jensen said the Hong Kong routes have been unprofitable for the past 10 years because of fewer passengers, increasing competition from other European airlines and high costs to operate from the new Chek Lap Kok airport.

"It's quite expensive to use the new airport, and Hong Kong is generally a very expensive place to operate," he said.

The number of passengers is off by about 20 per cent from the Airport Authority's forecast as international travellers, hit by the regional financial constraints, stay home, said Chris Donnelly, a spokesman for the government body running the airport.

It is faced with the same problem, Singapore recently slashed landing charges 10 per cent at the Changi Airport, Hong Kong's main competitor.

The move is expected to save airlines \$11 million a year, officials said.

Donnelly said the authority has no plans to raise charges, especially for car rents for retailers 25-40 per cent last year. He said the authority is required by law to balance the budget, "which can't leave us a lot of room to manoeuvre," he said.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House impeachment votes barely over, senators are pondering how to handle what would be the first trial of a sitting president in 130 years — or even whether to conduct one.

Whatever the course, members of both parties said Sunday they want a swift Senate resolution of the charges that President Bill Clinton lied and obstructed justice in trying to cover up his affair with Monica Lewinsky.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, a Utah Republican, suggested the first step should be a quick poll of his colleagues to determine if there is anywhere near the 67 votes needed to oust Clinton from office.

If there are only 55 votes — the number of Republicans in the Senate — "then there has to be some consideration to what do you do that is the best under the circumstances to resolve this matter and in the best interests of the country," Hatch said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

While that should include the start of a trial, he said, there are other options "where everybody could vote on this and vote their conscience and it would be fair." He refused to offer details.

Clinton's chief of staff, John Podesta, said the White House legal team would consider whether to challenge the constitutionality of a situation in which the charges against Clinton were brought in the outgoing 105th Congress but the president tried in the 106th Congress convening Jan. 6.

**Woman g  
known s**

will take a look at that in the days to come." Podestis said on CNN's "Late Edition." Some of the constitutional experts who have reviewed that matter believe that it is not consistent with the Constitution to have done this in a lame-duck Congress, especially in the partisan way that they did that. So, I think we'll have to take a look at that." Democrats suggested getting together with the White House and Senate Republicans to search for a compromise that would avoid a trial altogether.

Endorsing censure — a measure that Clinton has indicated he would accept — Sen. Christopher Dodd, a Connecticut Democrat, said a trial would "tie up three branches of government for the next four months." Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist would preside over a Senate trial, with charges presented by members of the House Judiciary Committee.

"In many ways, the Senate's on trial here in a way, too," Dodd said on NBC. "We're the court of last resort, of trying to restore some civility here." Senate Republicans, however, continued to insist on a trial or, in Hatch's case, at least the start of one.

"The Constitution says if you receive these articles you'll have a trial," Senate Majority Whip Don Nickles, an Oklahoma Republican, said on "Fox News Sunday."

"I think it can be done very quickly," (Senate Majority Leader) Trent Lott has said originally maybe three days to three weeks. I think he has it about right. I think it could be

done in three weeks if the White House wanted to." The White House, meanwhile, began preparing a defense to be led by White House Counsel Charles Ruff, with political guidance from people such as former Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, a Maine Democrat, who retired in 1994.

"We have been talking to a number of different senators, including Senator Mitchell, to get advice and counsel on how to deal with the Senate," Greg Craig, coordinator of the White House impeachment legal defense, told Fox.

Podesta noted that another former majority leader, Republican Bob Dole, recently wrote a guest column in *The New York Times* proposing a joint resolution of Congress to censure Clinton.

Saturday, the House approved two articles of impeachment against Clinton — one charging him with perjury, the other with obstruction of justice. Two other counts were defeated.

The matter was referred immediately to the 100-member Senate for resolution. The last time the Senate held a trial for the nation's chief executive, in 1968, it acquitted President Andrew Johnson by a single vote. Conviction takes a two-thirds majority.

Sen. Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, said the Senate was obligated to hold a trial, but it could be lamed by taking testimony from some witnesses in private. "This will not be a spectacle," he said on NBC. "It will not demean the Senate."

HOUSTON (AP) — Doctors knew the infant delivered two weeks ago was just one of several babies Nkem Chukwu carried in her womb. But none knew the girl was just one of a remarkable — and historic — eight.

Mrs. Chukwu delivered her daughter's five sisters and two brothers Sunday to complete the first known surviving set of octuplets. They ranged from 310 grammes to nearly a kilo, and all were in critical condition after birth.

"We're very hopeful all of the babies will survive, but they're critically ill newborns and we can't say for sure everything will be OK," said Dr. Patti Savick, a pediatrician at Texas Children's Hospital.

The first girl was 12 weeks premature, and the others were 10 weeks early. The survival rate for babies born so young is 85 per cent, doctors said.

The babies were whisked one by one to Texas Children's for an operating room at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital. A team of about 30 medical personnel were involved in the 45-minute

Seven of the babies were on ventilators Monday to help them breathe, and all eight will likely remain hospitalized for two or three months.

Dr. Leonard Weisman, chief neonatal specialist at Texas Children's, said he will watch for lung and heart problems over the next few days. After that, metabolic problems and infections are a danger.

"The babies are critically ill, but they currently all stable," Weisman said Monday morning on the NBC "Today" show.

Mrs. Chukwu, a Nigerian native who lives in Houston with her husband, Ike, was in stable condition Sunday night and could be out of the hospital by week's end. Her husband, a respiratory therapist, was not present for the deliveries and could not be reached for comment.

Mrs. Chukwu had been taking fertility drugs. She conceived triplets last year but lost them midway through her pregnancy.

The couple has no other children.

Until the first child was born naturally on Dec. 8, doctors were unsure how many fetuses Mrs. Chukwu was carrying because her uterus was so crowded, said Dr. Brian Kirshon, a specialist in high-risk births and one of three doctors who delivered the babies.

Mrs. Chukwu said she was making drugs to postpone labor, and Kirshon said giving birth to the first baby probably bought the other seven valuable time to mature. The littlest of the seven born Sunday might not have survived much longer in the womb, he said.

Mrs. Chukwu entered the hospital in early October and was confined to bed for six weeks. For the past 2 1/2 weeks, her bed was inclined with her head towards the floor in order to keep pressure off her lower body.

"I think she is remarkable in that she was able to tolerate extreme conditions, to lie upside down in that degree of discomfort and that degree of immobility," Kirshon said.

Mrs. Chukwu also was fed intravenously late in the pregnancy.

**PRISTINA, Yugoslavia (AP)** — A Serb policeman was reported killed and a woman wounded Monday in a tense northern Kosovo town, ushering in another week of bloodshed that threatens to plunge the Serb province back into all-out war.

The Serb-run Media Centre reported 52-year-old Milica Jovic was shot and wounded by unknown assailants using automatic weapons in Podujevo early Monday.

He died en route to the hospital. A woman accompanying Jovic was wounded in the leg, the center said. The information distributed by the Media Centre cannot be independently confirmed, but has proven reliable in the past.

Podujevo is overwhelmingly ethnic Albanian town some 40 kilometers north of Pristina, close to central Serbia. Tensions there have erupted in

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Podujevo is overwhelmingly ethnic Albanian town some 40 kilometers north of Pristina, close to central Serbia. Tensions there have even in

past weeks, as local Serbs complained of a growing guerrilla presence and demanded a state action against them.

Jovic's killing is the latest in a series of setbacks for Kosovo's fragile truce between Serb security forces and the ethnic Albanian separatist rebels. It is certain to enrage the Serbs, already furious over last week's killings of six Serb youths and a prominent Serb official.

The killing also came a day after the KLA buried 33 fighters who were killed last week in a border clash with the Yugoslav army. Some 5,000 Kosovo Albanians attended the funeral, pledging to continue their battle against the Serb state.

The attack on Jovic also heightens fears that violence in Kosovo is moving from the rugged countryside to the towns. The six youths were killed in a bar in the western

town of Pec and the official found dead last week was deputy major Kosovo Polje, a Serb stronghold outside

**Pristina.** The KLA has denied responsibility for the killings, but Serbian officials and media blame the KLA.

The minority Serbs are to stage another rally in Kosovo Polje Monday demanding protection against what they say is increasing danger from the Albanians. Serbia's interior minister is expected to address the rally.

The surge in tensions and incidents in Kosovo could disrupt a shaky cease fire agreed to in October, and lead to resumption of large-scale fighting. The previous Serb crackdown launched last February claimed more than 1,000 lives and forced some 300,000 people from their homes.

ful solution for Kosovo have failed so far with the two sides' positions still very much apart. Ethnic Albanians, who make up 90 per cent of the population, want independence while Serbia refuses to give up control over its southern province.

The KLA funeral Sunday was also aimed at presenting the rebels as a formidable force. A special, elite KLA unit, dressed in black uniforms, fired volleys of semi-automatic fire into the air in a final salute as the simple wooden caskets were lowered into the frozen

"We all together took the oath for the same cause," a KLA commander, Saban Shala, said in a eulogy. "And we promise you that we will continue our fighting for freedom."

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### Initiative worth pursuing

ALL EYES are now focused on the French initiative that President Jacques Chirac on Sunday said France would launch to deal more reasonably with the Iraqi situation following the U.S. and British attack on that country. President Chirac is already on record as being opposed to any military action against Iraq without the consent of the U.N. Security Council. Paris has long called for a general review of the Iraqi file and made daring attempts to relax the sanctions being imposed on Baghdad. France also stands out as opposing the agenda of both Washington and London on the need to change the regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein by foreign intervention. All in all, the credentials of the French president contrast sharply with those of U.S. President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

This places Paris in a unique position to take an initiative that can be acceptable to all sides especially Iraq, Russian and Chinese solidarity with any such French move would certainly lend valuable support to it within the U.N. Security Council. There is a basic agreement between the three major capitals that the case of Iraq must be returned to the council as sine qua non to any meaningful, just and permanent settlement of the decade-long crisis. This would necessarily mean the renouncement of any use of force by either Washington and London in the future and the immediate relaxation of the sanctions on Iraq.

Moscow, Beijing and Paris were obviously outraged by the unilateral military actions of the U.S. and Britain. The remaining missing link in the efforts to breathe more life into the French initiative is the elaboration of an effective Arab position. The Arab capitals have been caught off guard by the events of last week and saw their mild and ineffective reactions overshadowed by Russian, Chinese and Vatican pronouncements. The Arab World needs to get its act together by adopting a clear and coherent stance on the Iraqi situation and on how to deal with it in the aftermath of last week's bombardments of the country.

The Lower House of Parliament in Jordan has taken due notice of the bold declarations of Moscow, Beijing and the Vatican on Iraq and lamented, and rightly so, Arab inaction. This is as good an occasion as any for the major Arab capitals to coordinate their efforts with Paris, Moscow and Beijing in order to bring back sanity and compassion to the conflict.

### ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Faneh said the recent U.S.-British aggression on Iraq was criminal by any standards and had been planned long ago. The report of UNSCOM's chief inspector Richard Butler, who is a "spy" provided Clinton with a justified excuse to strike Iraq at suitable time. Faneh argued, referring to the U.S. president's return from his visit to the Gaza Strip and Israel, to the impeachment vote in Washington. Clinton himself has not claimed that the attack was on behalf of the U.N., said the writer, as the aggression, in fact, represented a breach of the international community. Faneh said the strikes were aimed at protecting Israel, and not Iraq's Arab and Islamic neighbour as the U.S. president claimed, adding that the latest U.S. crime, which killed hundreds of Iraqi civilians and destroyed several homes, schools and hospitals, as well as oil refineries, was targeting all Arab and Muslim people. If the U.S. chooses to practise international terrorism, said Faneh, then it does not retain the right to complain about fundamentalism which results from these policies. Clinton lied under oath in the Lewinsky case, why should he not do the same in this instance, asked Faneh.

Al Arab Al Yawm's Saleh Qallab said that by halting the air strikes on Iraq, one round of confrontation with U.S. President Bill Clinton has ended. The U.S. leader conditioned the end of the strikes on UNSCOM's return to the country, said Qallab. Clinton renewed his support to the Iraqi opposition, talked about replacing Saddam Hussein's regime with a democratic government, stressed that U.S. forces will remain in the region, and said the ban on Iraqi aviation in the north and south will continue, said Qallab. These conditions imply that the situation will remain as is in the region, which could result in worse developments, said the writer, adding that U.S. efforts are likely to focus on forming an alleged democratic state by the Iraqi opposition. This new tactic would require establishing no-man's lands in the north and the south, and from there both the opposition and the U.S. can attack the regime, claimed Qallab. As such, warned the writer, Arabs have to be aware of this danger, unify their efforts against it, and prepare themselves for a confrontation.

## Bill, Tony, Saddam and the ghosts of Ramadans past

I HAVE tried to find rational reasons for the ferocious Anglo-American bombing of Iraq last week, but have been unable to identify any that stand the test of law, morality, logic, or reasonable political practicality. Aiming to "degrade" Iraq's capacity to develop and use weapons of mass destruction, the British-American attacks in fact have degraded much more than that, in both the Middle East and their own lands.

This recurring Anglo-American instinct for imperial violence, racist rhetoric, and insulting moralistic censure has assumed such epic proportions that it will find a deserved place in history. That place will be alongside the comic escapades of Daffy Duck, Tom and Jerry, Popeye the Sailor Man, and other cartoon characters - who engage in perpetual violence without achieving either merciful closure or justifiable and measurable results, only repeated chuckles from an amused audience. In fact, the justifications, conduct, and aftermath of the Anglo-American bombing will probably have the opposite effect of that which was intended by the U.S. and the U.K. The Anglo-American claim that Iraq today threatens its neighbours remains an unproved charge, because Iraq has been effectively contained since 1991 (though Iraq was a threat to Kuwait in 1990, to be sure). If we - Iraq's allegedly threatened neighbours - are shown convinc-

ing proof of Iraqi threats to our well-being, we would probably join a legitimate international effort to deter and contain Iraq. But this is not the case. Cartoon-time is the case.

Iraq's weapons of mass destruction largely were being efficiently contained and destroyed via the U.N. inspections and embargo system. If Iraq was not cooperating with the U.N. weapons inspectors, the best approach would have been to engage Iraq more diligently in order to complete and improve the inspections system. Last week's attacks may spur Iraq or others in the region to find more effective clandestine means of developing, buying, and hiding weapons of mass destruction, all of which can be rebuilt or repurchased. The Americans and British degraded a rather effective U.N. weapons inspections system that was limiting Iraq's potential to cause harm in the region. Good-bye weapons inspectors, hello Daffy.

The "degrading" of Iraq's weapons capabilities has been accompanied by a degrading in the credibility of the United Nations' peace-making role; a degrading in the standing of the U.S. and U.K. in the Middle East; a degrading of Western credibility because U.N. resolutions on Iraq are implemented with much more force than U.N. resolutions on Palestine/Israel; and a degrading in the relations between the

U.S.-U.K. duet and the other great powers (expressed most dramatically Monday by Moscow's suggestions of a Russian-Indian-Chinese get-together, to counter the hegemonic, neo-imperial policies of the U.S. and U.K.).

Added to this is the insulting, facile, and politically racist suggestion by Bill Clinton and Tony Blair that they wish to avoid attacking Iraq during Ramadan. The true spiritual meaning of Ramadan is alien to these confused middle aged men driven by the brutality of power politics and the psychology of loins and manhood, whose drifting moral shipwrecks whose policies have killed tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians in Ramadans past due to the impact of their countries' bombings and embargo. Clinton/Blair cogage in political and religious blasphemy. They speak of respect for Muslims during this Ramadan, but in private they should be haunted and tormented by the ghosts of Ramadans past.

The fact that the Anglo-Americans must bomb Iraq every few years emphasises the gross failure of unilateral punitive militarism and economic barbarism as an effective policy. These tactics have not had the desired effect of bringing Iraq to its knees, though they have so far contained Iraq's military power and kept the Iraqi state and people pulverised and dehumanised

### A View from the Fourth Circle



Rami G. Khouri

over the past decade.

The recurring Anglo-American resort to military barbarism is now also combined (again) with the Captain Kangaroo School of Diplomacy's support of the Iraqi opposition - probably the most non-credible and ineffective national or political movement since the advent of the modern nation-state in Mesopotamia about five-thousand years ago. To the comic has been added the truly hallucinatory. Clinton/Blair do not merely blaspheme, they dream-blaspheme.

Most of us in the Arab World also condemn many aspects of the Iraqi regime's behaviour at home and regionally, though we

are equally offended by the sustained political violence, and moralistic double-talk of both the Iraqi and Anglo-American regimes. Most of us see U.S.-U.K. unilateral military intervention in the Middle East as the more serious threat, both as a historical fact and a recurring nightmare. The consequences of last week's events confirm this yet again.

So what should be done about the legitimate challenge of Iraq and its occasionally aggressive policies? We should remember how the world has addressed other serious disputes in places like Northern Ireland, North Korea, Northern Cyprus, East Timor, Tibet, Kashmir, the Western Sahara, and others. The right approach is: identify the problem and its multiple root causes, address those issues diligently, deal with the protagonists on the basis of law, legitimacy and human and national dignity, remove the underlying causes of conflict by dealing in a wider regional context, bring in the main other interested parties in the neighbourhood, forge compromises, combine punishments with rewards, and painstakingly seek to achieve justice, stability, progress, and sustainable peace. Why can the British and Americans adopt this sensible approach in other conflicts around the world, but not in Iraq?

## Happy holidays, sonic boom style

By Hady Amr

LEBANON — I leapt out of bed as a BOOM shook Beirut. It wasn't an earthquake. I knew that. A year ago April when an earthquake rattled Lebanon I had a tough time getting out of bed, I was too tired. But this was different, more menacing, and from above. It was just before 9 a.m. Wednesday, December 9. I rushed to the balcony to survey the neighbourhood. Many like me were scanning the horizon for signs of an air raid. A few others ducked inside buildings for cover. Israeli jets, we could hear them. I checked the calendar. It was two weeks before Christmas, a week before Hanukkah and 10 days before Ramadan. "Good!" I thought, "was it this part of the world that sometimes start on a holiday, at least it's not a holiday today."

It couldn't have been more than a few hours after U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala had left Lebanon having just paid the longest U.S. cabinet-level visit to Lebanon (four days) since 1975. It was a "feel good" visit. Ms. Shalala, the highest-ranking Lebanese-American to serve in office (and who taught English in Lebanon in the 1960s) visited schools in poor rural areas, paid a visit to Lebanon's new president, and debated students at the American University of Beirut. She talked about a new era of "peace and prosperity" for Lebanon.

Since yesterday morning, Israel has been dropping virtual "sound bombs" over Beirut about three times a day. That's more often than I get square meals most of the time. In reality, they've just been swooping their warplanes down over Beirut and other cities breaking the sound barrier and in the process breaking windows, and sending young kids scurrying in a strange attempt to terrorise the population, or convince them of something. But of what, I'm not sure.

Yesterday a friend's blonde-haired, blue-eyed 9-year-old daughter, who looked a lot like the girl I had a crush on back in elementary school in Morristown, New Jersey, explained to us how the teachers had instructed them to move away from the windows during sonic blasts. Bouncy and smiling with her new red backpack, she proudly said that she "didn't cry like some

of the others." After she dashed inside for lunch, I remembered the hope I had that a "new generation" of kids might grow up here not knowing war.

And today, a new friend who's recently returned from Stanford to practise as a clinical psychologist complained to me that because of the booms she's been unable to sleep, I imagine she's holding up, but I wonder how her counselling patients are doing.

I'm really not sure what purpose Netanyahu, the democratically elected leader of Lebanon's southern "neighbour," thinks these brazen acts serve, other than to remind the Lebanese that Israel has enough weapons of mass destruction to wipe Lebanon off the face of the earth for good, and the ability to deliver them. Or does he want Lebanese to know that he could turn back the clock to the war era when they flew raids over Lebanon regularly? Thank you very much. As if the Lebanese had forgotten. As far as I know, Lebanon hardly has an air force.

More likely, the sonic booms we've been served for breakfast, lunch and dinner, although at odd hours, are Bibi's creation to get himself out of the political corner he's painted himself into between his own right wing and President Clinton. Though, the more than \$3 billion in assistance, about \$600 per Israeli the U.S. gives Israel each year, isn't really in question. To top it off, Netanyahu is under pressure from mainstream Israelis, including many in the security establishment, to end Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon which has killed at least 20 Israeli soldiers and 33 Lebanese this year. But raiding Lebanon and trying to strike fear in the hearts of the Lebanese out of electoral desperation sure didn't help Peres in the polls, and I don't think it'll work for Netanyahu either.

Israel's erratic actions in Lebanon are a sign that an Israeli leader is in deep electoral trouble. Two-and-a-half years ago, Israeli "dove" Shimon Peres was up against an electoral wall with Netanyahu gaining ground in the polls. Peres ordered a "mini" invasion of Lebanon during which Israel killed over 100 Lebanese civilians when it bombed a United Nations safe haven, an act which they are being sued for to the

International Criminal Court based on new videotaped evidence that Israel was aiming directly for the safe haven.

A few days later, along with many other Arab-Americans, I was in the Old Executive Office Building, discussing the situation with the acting Secretary of State. Little consolation. Peres meanwhile narrowly lost the election in a vote, one of my Princeton political science professors described to me over Thanksgiving break as one which "almost made me an opponent of democracy." Although I was not too happy to see Netanyahu elected, I had hopes Israeli leaders would learn a lesson that their Rambo-like forays into Lebanon would backfire, both on the battlefield and at the ballot box. Apparently, they haven't.

This year Israel has raided Lebanon more than a hundred times with its warplanes and rockets, terrorising residents of southern Lebanon on a regular basis. That's probably more often than even the health conscious among us go jogging. I know it more than I do. This fall, during the dry season, Israel began using phosphorus bombs to start fires to deforest Lebanon, claiming that Lebanese resisting the occupation were using the forests as cover, what little is left of them.

And if that wasn't had enough, the U.N. verified that this fall Israel actually succeeded in stealing hundreds of metric tonnes of highly fertile Lebanese topsoil to bolster farms in the Galilee, giving a new twist to the concept of "Land-for-Peace." Does Lebanon get the topsoil back if it signs a peace treaty with Israel? In a way, though, these actions just add insult to injury. Israel and its mercenaries have continued to occupy a significant portion of southern Lebanon for about 20 years now, claiming that the land protects their security. It's a place where thousands of Lebanese should be calling home, except for the fact that they can't live there because of the Israeli occupation.

This isn't the first time I've had U.S.-made and supplied weapons disrupt my life. But that was elsewhere, Israel's other front, the West Bank and Gaza, and before the "peace process," thank goodness times have changed. Don't get me wrong, I'm not against the "peace process" I just

wish it entailed exchanging Israeli "security" for some dignity for Palestinians. When I first visited Gaza on a human rights mission 10 years ago just before my college graduation back in New England, it wasn't a place that President Reagan would visit. The Clinton visit shows just how much things have changed. Gaza was my first experience with military curfew (during which tens of thousands of Gazans would spend literally months a year under house arrest) and tear gas (made in good old Pennsylvania where my brother was born).

I probably wouldn't have made it out of Gaza in one piece, let alone in time, for my cherry blossom-filled graduation, if it weren't for the U.S. passport I was born with. That fall of 1988, when I helped organise a citizen-sponsored referendum question to voice the opinion that the U.S. should end military assistance to the Israeli occupation, just about every significant Massachusetts Democrat and Republican came out of the woodwork calling us the nastiest of names and opposing our efforts. Needless to say a majority of the citizens of Cambridge Massachusetts voted for our effort.

U.S. politics have changed a lot since the 1980s when Arafat and the PLO were outlawed terrorists, and much of the credit goes to President Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton for their courageous efforts at the White House, at Wye, and soon in Gaza to embrace Palestinians along with Israelis, something that hasn't been easy in the U.S. political system, let me tell you.

Oh, I almost forgot: Best wishes from Lebanon and happy holidays.

I really had intended to write a different kind of New Year's greeting filled with stories of successful community development efforts here but I just can't. Maybe next year? Right now I'm just looking forward to Christmas in New York with my family, and New Years in snowy New England with my close friends. In the meantime, I hope you'll all come and visit. It's safe, really. Just bring your ear plugs and don't mind the sonic booms!

The writer is a columnist for the Arab-American Mirror which is devoted solely to Arab-American affairs and the Middle East.

## Between Iraq and a hard place: football, a Hail Mary, and the bombings

By Ray Hanania

THE RECENT bombing of Iraq is the Super bowl of American political hysteria. It is also the main icon in the Cathedral of American religious worship. This military strike was not intended to defeat Saddam Hussein, but it had another purpose.

It could not be intended to defeat Saddam Hussein because it had absolutely no significant impact on changing or eliminating Saddam Hussein's government.

Just as the bombings in the past have already demonstrated this, this bombing will also prove to have fallen short of the objectives enunciated by President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (who has referred to potential Iraqi civilian casualties and death as "collateral damage").

So what was the real purpose of the bombing? American politicians always have a real purpose behind everything they do.

The bombing does nothing to stop Saddam Hussein, but it does put the crust on the American Pie. It serves the selfish interests of American politicians. It preserves the American way of life. It reinforces the American Dream.

It achieves as much for the American people as does watching a Super bowl football game or going to church.

Americans hold Saddam Hussein to a double standard of cursing and denunciation, far above other worldly villains that we are willing to tolerate. Take, for example, world villains like Yugoslav's Hitler-like leader, Slobodan Milosevic.

Americans need Saddam Hussein to guarantee their own security and to justify their own self-worth in the world. Because they believe they are better than everyone else, Americans use Saddam Hussein to serve and protect their vanity.

The Politics of the Bombing: Let's be honest about why President Clinton ordered the bombing, shall we? The day before the bombs fell, Clinton faced a near certain impeachment by the House of Representatives. His strategy over the past few weeks during the Impeachment Hearings had been to appeal to Americans to rise up in protest and pressure "moderate" Republicans to vote against impeachment.

That revolution has not materialised. Oh Americans oppose impeachment, but they are too busy buying Christmas presents produced by South American sweatshop operations to mount the kind of angry emotional reaction Clinton was hoping for. So now, plan 2, the old reliable Iraqi Strategy.

By attacking Iraq, Clinton's strategists hoped they could rally the emotions of the American people to the heights that they need. Once the American public reaches the emotional summit sought by Clinton and co-sponsor James Carville, Clinton hoped that a "residual" impact will be that Americans would then redirect their newly heightened passions toward the "moderate" Republicans in the hopes of defeating an impeachment vote.

The bombing did delay the vote on impeachment, giving Clinton more time to lobby wavering Republicans.

The Importance of Religious Polarity: You must also understand the influence of Religion has on American psyche in order to fully appreciate how this bombing serves to manipulate American public opinion.

American society is a "Christian" society.

But the Christianity that emerged from the belly of the Middle East is not the same Christianity that is practised here in the United States.

Arab Christianity is founded on deep devotion. American Christianity is not.

While Middle East Christians, for example, observe their religion as a form of "self righteousness" and worship of a Greater Being, American Christians base their obedience on a theory of "religious polarity." Americans are Christians because they fear sin. They fear punishment. They fear purgatory. And, most of all, they fear the agent of these heinous religious crimes, The Devil.

Without the Devil, American Christianity is meaningless. It has no purpose.

Why do Americans need a religion if there is nothing to fear and if salvation is therefore preordained? The Devil answers that question, and the Devil keeps Americans loyal to their faith.

The American concept of religious "faith" is based on "fear." This is a competitive nature. It comes from the polarity that exists in American sports and in religion. It comes from many years of conditioning.

Americans escape to Hollywood movies where the dream of fantasy victories — explaining their neurosis and obsession with watching movies where fantasy American military units defeat terrorists in the most unlikely and ridiculous of circumstances.

Americans portray themselves as the heroes of the world. But how can one be a hero without a villain? How can one be religious without a Devil? How can Americans be so great, if there is no Saddam Hussein out there to bash?

The writer is a Palestinian-American journalist and author.

When I grow up, I



# No success in solving Colorado child's murder

By Judith Crosson  
Reuters

TALK SHOWS still debate it and an accusing finger remains pointed at the parents but, other than two detectives who quit in a huff and a grand jury being convened, little has changed in America's biggest ongoing mystery — the unsolved murder of Jon-Benet Ramsey.

The body of the 6-year-old with the golden locks who sang and danced her way to awards in child beauty contests was found in the family's home the day after Christmas 1996.

As the second anniversary of her death approaches, the case remains as cloudy as it was when Patricia Ramsey came down the back staircase before dawn to make coffee and found a ransom note demanding \$118,000 for the safe return of her child.

But Jon-Benet was never kidnapped. Instead her body was found several hours later by her father in the basement of the family's home in Boulder, Colorado. The case has become a war of contrary opinions: talk show hosts and columnists lay out a case against the parents, while a documen-

tary film counters that news media hungry for headlines have rushed to judgment.

The case has spawned several lawsuits and some people have called for the appointment of a special prosecutor to replace Boulder County District Attorney Alex Hunter.

The death attracted national and international attention, the result in part of videos showing Jon-Benet, made up and dressed in sexy outfits, performing in child beauty pageants.

People who never met her have joined camps for and against her parents, who have repeatedly denied any connection with her death. Even if Americans have become inured to violence against children, the facts in the case are chilling.

The little girl with the heart-shaped face was beaten and strangled. She may have been sexually assaulted. Yet despite the spotlight focused on the heinous crime, no one has been arrested and it is not clear that anyone ever will be.

"Statistically every day that passes it gets harder and harder to get a conviction," trial lawyer Scott Robinson said.

Police have said the parents, John and

Patricia Ramsey, are under an "umbrella of suspicion." The Ramseys, who now live in the Atlanta area with their son Burke, have

*'The reward is even open to the killer who, [John Ramsey] argued, must have someone near and dear who could use the money'*

criticised police in turn for failing to find the murderer and have offered a reward for information leading to an arrest.

In a bizarre twist to an already strange case, John Ramsey said the reward was even open to the killer who, he argued, must have someone near and dear who could use the

money.

Police who arrived at the scene on Dec. 26 when the parents called made mistakes that compromised the crime scene. Friends of the Ramseys were allowed by authorities to stay in the house while the parents waited for the "kidnapper" to call. "It's what I call the ransom note party," Robinson said.

Also, police let John Ramsey and a friend search the house rather than taking control of the crime scene themselves, possibly allowing potential evidence to be corrupted. "The scene was not preserved," the Denver lawyer noted.

A grand jury began meeting behind closed doors in mid-September. Unlike police, a grand jury can compel witnesses to testify and provide evidence. The panel is not meeting in December so, the speculation goes, the eight women and four men will avoid the hoopla that is bound to emerge on the second anniversary of the murder.

The case has set off a round of lawsuits including one by Linda Arndt, the first detective on the scene. She sued the city of Boulder and former police chief Tom Kohy, alleging a "gag order" kept her from correcting false statements about her in the

media and deprived her of a right to free speech.

Boulder photographer Stephen Miles is suing John Ramsey and the tabloid National Enquirer for two late 1997 articles that said John Ramsey suggested Miles had killed Jon-Benet. Ramsey denies the remark and the magazine says it stands by its story.

The photographer said his life was destroyed by the articles.

And, as if there were not enough crime in New York City, lawyer Darney Hoffman, who represented subway vigilante gunman Bernhard Goetz, has been trying from 2500 kms away to get a special prosecutor named in the Jon-Benet case, saying the local district attorney is ignoring the evidence.

Hoffman is not alone. Boulder Oet. Steve Thomas resigned in August saying he could no longer stand by and watch the D.A. hotch the case. Hunter's office denied the charge.

A month later, retired detective Lou Smit, who was brought in to help Boulder police, also resigned, saying he believed the Ramseys were innocent and that an intruder was responsible for the killing.

## Environment

### Thai elephants paint to save themselves

By James Mclean  
Reuters

BABY ELEPHANT Nam Chok grips the brush in his trunk and, with a few words of encouragement from his handler, slaps the canvas in front of him with bright blue paint. Nam Chok is among about a dozen Thai elephants learning to paint under a new scheme that its supporters say could ultimately improve the lives of Thailand's revered but struggling national animal.

Russian artistic partnership Alex Melamid and Vitaly Komar are hoping to bring images painted by Thailand's elephants to mainstream Western art markets under the auspices of the Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Project.

They have just opened what they say are the world's first academies for aspiring elephant artists and hope exposure of paintings produced by elephants at these camps will establish a demand for the paintings, and help Thai elephant handlers, or mahouts, to feed their animals.

Profits from painting sales in the United States will be channelled back into elephant projects in Thailand via the World Wildlife Fund, while the painting academies can add to their coffers by selling elephant art directly to visitors.

Melamid, who first came to Thailand in June to promote the idea, returned in November to open three painting schools — one at Lamphang in the extreme north, one in the central ancient capital of Ayutthaya, and one in the southern island of Phuket.

"We know elephants can paint and paint wonderfully. Our job now is to turn the paintings into commodities," Melamid said.

"Right now in the U.S. we are trying to establish a price at about \$250 per painting, which is quite big money in Thailand," he added.

The project arrives as Thailand's working elephants and their mahouts struggle to cope with a fast-changing world in which traditional occupations are quickly disappearing.

An official ban on logging has helped protect Thailand's dwindling forests but has also destroyed the major source of work for the country's elephants.

Chisanu Tiyacharoensri, secretary general of the Wild Animal Rescue Foundation of Thailand, said that with few job options, elephants and their handlers are often forced into illegal logging, begging in Bangkok, or selling rides to tourists.

Mahouts need about 1000 baht (\$27) a day to feed their animal, he said.

"To solve this problem you have to see this

as a problem not just of the elephants but of the people," Chisanu said.

"We are talking about a vicious cycle. Most of the mahouts are not well-educated. It is a problem of the poor," he said.

Illegal loggers have fed elephants amphetamines so they can work through the night, Chisanu said. In some of the worst cases, desperate mahouts have even killed their elephants because they can no longer afford to keep them.

"Two years ago there were 3,600 domestic elephants in Thailand but figures released two months ago show there are now only 3,100," he said.

If the painting camps prove popular, they might offer a viable alternative.

"If this project works, there are plans to expand it to other camps," he said.

But much depends on the strength of the market for elephant art. Unlike chimpanzees, elephants do not paint recognisable images.

Instead, according to the new project's art historian Mia Fineman, they are abstract expressionist "masters of the spontaneous gesture on canvas" in the mould of Jackson Pollock.

"What is very exciting for us at the moment is that we see elephants in Thailand developing their own regional styles," Fineman says.

"The Thai paintings are the result of a collaboration between the mahout and the elephant. It is generally the mahout who decides the colours and when the painting is finished," she says.

For Melamid, who is now talking to coffee company Starbucks Corp and entertainment giant Walt Disney about promoting and using the images, there is no doubt about the quality of the art.

And despite a reputation for teasing art world egos, Melamid says he and Komar are out not to make a point, but to help Thailand's elephants.

"We are here to help solve the problems of Thailand's elephants," he said. "Elephants are not as smart as humans but I'm not sure you have to be smart to be a great painter. In fact, some of the greatest painters were dumb," he said.

"From our experience they (elephants) know the difference between colours. That may come from the smell of the paints, or by shades of grey, but they do know the difference between colours," he added.

"The thing is that no one knows what art is. We truly believe there is some essence in art that is something bigger than us, something non-human, and I believe elephants are as brilliant as us in this area."

### China tipped as chief culprit for ozone erosion

By Neena Bhandari

HIGH IN the stratosphere, between 12km and 27km above ground level, lies the Earth's sun block: A layer of ozone which prevents ultraviolet radiation from reaching the Earth's sun block: A layer of ozone which prevents ultraviolet radiation from reaching the Earth's surface.

That layer has been steadily eroded over the last few decades by chemicals commonly used in a wide range of manufacturing processes and products, putting humans at risk of higher incidences of skin cancer, immunodeficiency and eye cataracts.

This September, the hole was bigger than it has ever been: A 27 million square kilometres gap, three times the size of Australia, over the southern hemisphere.

The U.S. National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA) believes a severe Arctic ozone hole will also develop, tripling levels of UV radiation hitting northern hemisphere countries.

And according to a new report published by the Environmental Investigation Agency, much of the blame can be laid at China's door.

The report, entitled "A Crime Against Nature: The worldwide illegal trade in ozone depleting substances (OOS)," identified more than 20 companies in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, Tianjin and Oalian port in northern China producing OOS which permeated the markets of the U.S., France, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Greece and Spain.

Many of them like the Ningbo Material General Corporation advertised on the Internet and claimed to have shipped 100 tonnes of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), one of the key ODS, annually to an Italian customer since 1995.

CFCs are the most well-known OOS, given their extensive use in refrigeration equipment, air conditioners and aerosol sprays.

Others — hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) and halons, the latter widely used in military, aerospace, shipping and the oil

and gas industries — are also responsible for ozone depletion.

The damage they do to the ozone layer has been known since 1974, when Sherwood Rowland and Mario Molina, scientists at the University of California at Davis, published findings that CFCs can remain in the atmosphere and release large quantities

of chlorine when broken down by the sun. This in turn breaks down high-level ozone protecting the earth from UV radiation.

By the 80s, governments and inter-governmental organisations drew up a world plan resulting in the convention was adopted in 1987 in Montreal, coming into force in January 1989 and aimed at controlling the production and consumption of ozone-depleting substances.

The parties to the protocol are meeting in Cairo to discuss what action needs to be taken to restrict the release of CFCs and halons and bring new OOS under the regime.

"International regulations permit trade in recycled CFCs and halons," explained EIA Campaigns Director Steve Trent, "but this clause is used as a cover to trade virgin (newly manufactured) chemicals."

This is where China — which has not signed the Montreal Pro-

TOCOL — is at fault, according to the report. Its factories sell both virgin and recycled OOS at extremely low prices, exporting CFC12 at between \$1.30 and \$2.40/kg and halon 1301 between \$7.50 and \$9.50/kg.

According to the EIA, even where exports are labelled as "recycled" the sheer quantities

suggest that virgin manufacture is the true source.

The problem in Europe is that a great deal of refrigeration and air-conditioning equipment across the EU still relies on CFC12. Industry analysts estimate the scale of the illegal trade at between 6,500 and 10,000 tonnes each year.

As for the U.S., during 1997 over 200 tonnes of Chinese CFC12 entered the U.S. market and this amount has been equalled in just the first six months of 1998.

Worse is the halon situation in North America. Both the production and sale of halons are banned in developed countries.

A number of firms have invested in the capital intensive task of reclaiming halons. The U.S. is the premier market for reclaimed halon 1301, although a substantial demand remains in Europe. U.S. Bureau of Census statistics show a total import of over 670 tonnes of halons into the U.S. during

1997 from China — the biggest at 235 tonnes — Germany, Italy, Norway, U.K. and Canada.

Yet partly thanks to Chinese brokers who have set up shop in the U.S., says the report, "the influx of cheap material has caused a gross distortion in the North American halon market, adversely affecting legitimate recycling operations. For instance the usual market price for reclaimed halon 1301 in North America is over \$20/kg, while the Chinese material can be obtained for \$8.50/kg."

And though even the Chinese material is certified, for import licence purposes, as reclaimed or recycled, halon plants in China are shown in the EIA report to be almost exclusively for manufacture.

The main customers, it says, are the U.S. Department of Defence and British Petroleum.

As a result, the atmosphere concentration of halons continues to increase. Used mainly for fire suppression, they contain bromine, which does 40-60 times more damage to ozone than the chlorine found in CFCs.

"China, which can continue to produce halon until 2010, more than doubled its production of halons between 1992-94 and was responsible for 90 per cent of the world's halon output in the latter year," the report explains.

It has to be remembered, though, that China is supplying a market in the developed world that, in theory, is no longer interested in ozone depleting substances. Although the EIA's report lays much of the blame for the illegal trade on China, it recognises that the developed world signatories are still the bulk consumers of illicit ozone depleting substances. It is possible that this factor is what stands in the way of effective monitoring and enforcement.

In other words, the onus is on the developed world. And as with all things environmental, time is running out.

— Gemini News

### Fear at night in India quake zone

By Giri Venkatesan  
Reuters

THE PEOPLE of Pandhara no longer want a roof over their heads. Two months after the first of some 1,100 tremors shook the ground beneath their feet, their biggest fear is that an earthquake will strike while they are sleeping in their homes and bring the roofs crashing down on their heads.

So the 12,000 residents of this dusty town in Madhya Pradesh state in central India sleep in tents outside their houses every night and go back in the morning.

Uncertainty and a sense of fatalism, imbued in a people steeped in traditional Indian beliefs, is almost palpable among the townsfolk and some 24,000 people staying in more than a score of outlying villages.

For them it is only a question of time before the earthquake will strike.

"We are waiting for the big one," said 35-year-old Mohan Lal, a wheat and chibilly farmer.

"Normally, we would be praying that no disaster strikes us, but now we are fed up and are hoping that the earthquake hits us and then the tension at least will be over," Mohan Lal said.

Scientists have predicted that a series of mild tremors in the area are just the prelude to a major earthquake around this point on the Narmada-Tapti-Sone fault zone.

And the local administration has taken the scientists' warning seriously enough to insure the

lives of all 36,000 of the area's residents for \$1,179 each for one year.

While the amount looks small in dollar terms, it is still nearly three times India's per capita income of \$390 in 1997.

The daily trepidation of waiting for a quake has pushed thoughts of forthcoming state elections in Madhya Pradesh out of people's minds.

Madhya Pradesh, along with three other states, goes to the polls on November 25 to elect new provincial governments.

"We do not even know what tomorrow will bring," said Roshan Lal, a potato farmer. "How do you expect me to think about elections now?"

Dusty, bumpy four-hour drive south from India's soybean centre of Indore, some 800 km to the south of New Delhi, brings visitors to Pandhara, a town where almost every house boasts a tent extension.

The tents range from elaborate affairs with proper poles and pegs to simple tarpaulin or plastic sheets drawn from the roofs of the houses to their fences.

The tents contain cots and bedding rolls, with pillows and sheets.

"We mainly use them at night and only for sleeping," said Manoj Kumar Jain, a trader.

"During the daytime, there is no fear as we are awake and if there is a quake, we can run out into the open and be safe, but at night we will be caught unawares." Despite the number of tremors that have hit the region since the first was recorded on September 11, no houses have

collapsed and no casualties have been reported. "So far the strongest has been 3.7 on the Richter scale," said a district administration official.

The threat of a quake has not disrupted daily life in Pandhara, only the approach of night puts people on edge.

The market place bustles with activity, with fruit and vegetable vendors loudly hawking their wares. In a corner, a trader sells plastic combs, small mirrors and toys.

In the local school, children loudly recite their lessons, in a scene typical of many rural schools across the country.

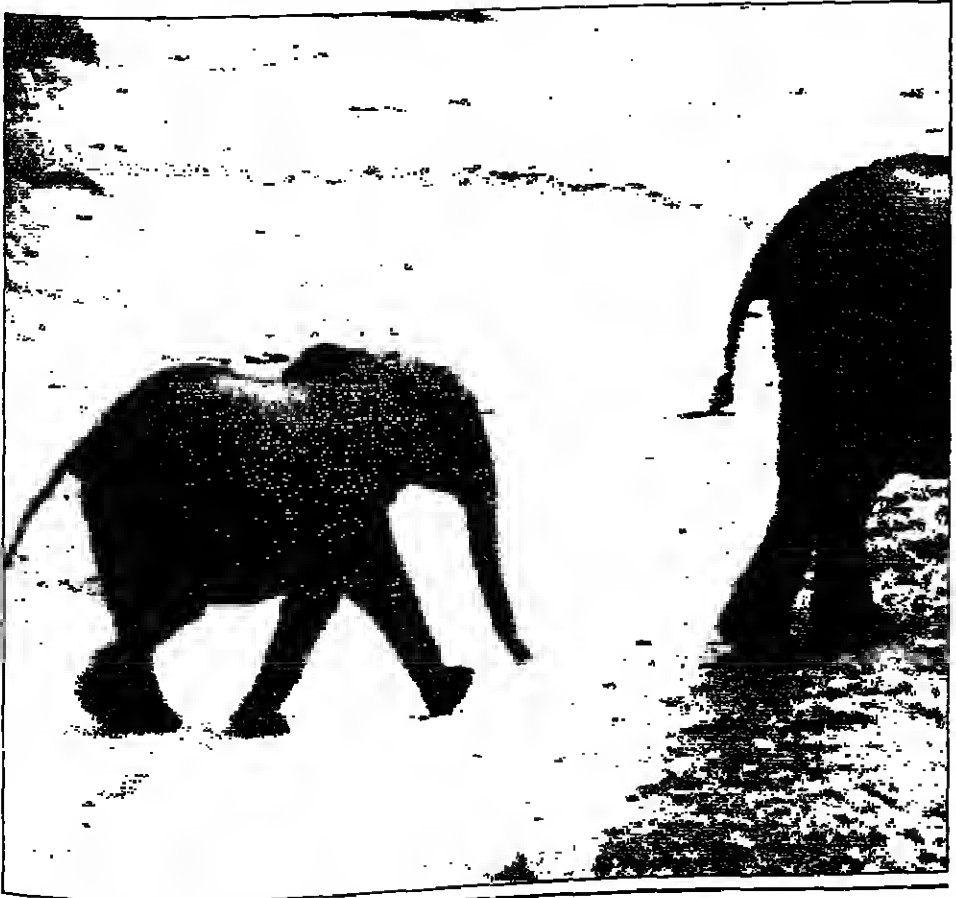
But some residents have decided they have lived in fear for long enough and are sick of sleeping outdoors.

Textiles trader Surendra Kumar, his wife and two children all sleep inside their house.

"How long can we live in fear," Kumar said. "Also, my house is built of cement and is stronger than the other houses. The chances of it collapsing are less so we sleep inside." The administration, for its part, has taken what it says are the maximum possible precautions.

"We have arranged for three mobile operation theatres and around 70 doctors are on standby," said R.P. Mandal, the chief official at the district headquarters of Khandwa.

"We have also stockpiled medicines worth 500,000 rupees in case of emergency," he added.



When I grow up, I want to be Picasso (file photo)



## IMF says global economy emerging from crisis

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Global financial turmoil has begun to subside and the danger of recession has diminished, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported Monday, as it revised upward its 1998 worldwide growth forecast to 2.2 per cent.

"The worst of the crisis probably is now behind us," said IMF Deputy Director of Research Flemming Larsen. The International Monetary Fund, which had estimated 1998 global growth at two per cent in a report last October, said the world economy — buoyed by interest rate cuts in rich countries and reforms in Asia — would also expand by 2.2 per cent in 1999.

While the 1999 forecast is down three-tenths of a point from the October projection, the fund said the revision was much smaller than those published in the last two issues of its twice-yearly World Economic Outlook report.

"The modest scale of the further downward revision to the world growth projections for 1999 may reasonably be viewed as indicating

that the global situation and near-term prospects have begun to stabilise," the latest study concluded.

But the IMF was markedly pessimistic about prospects for Japan, Brazil and Russia and warned that "the balance of risks still seems to be predominantly on the downside."

Nevertheless, financial markets in South Korea and Thailand had improved significantly, China was flourishing and the industrialised world was stable.

The report noted that in October the IMF had concluded that "the risks of a deeper, wider and more prolonged downturn have escalated."

The report said advanced countries would show growth of two per cent this year and 1.6 per cent in 1999.

The newly industrialised Asian nations — South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong — would bounce back from negative growth of 2.6 per cent this year to 0.5 per cent in 1999.

The ASEAN 4 — Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines — should move from negative growth of 10.6 per cent in 1998 to minus 1.4 next year.

African economies are predicted to expand 3.6 per cent this year and 3.8 per cent in 1999, while those in Latin America would post growth of 2.5 per cent this year and 1.5 per cent in the next.

But in Japan, where according to the IMF "recent data point to a continued deepening of the recession," the economy is seen contracting 2.8 per cent this year, compared to the October projection of 2.5 per cent.

While the IMF in October had foreseen a return to positive growth in Japan next year of 0.5 per cent, it now says the economy should contract by the same amount.

Russia will see negative growth of 5.7 per cent in 1998, an improvement over the October projection of negative six per cent, but in 1999 the Russian economy will contract by 8.3 per cent, rather than six per cent foreseen by the IMF in October.

The IMF warned that the situation could deteriorate even further in Russia "given the continuing fiscal imbalances, banking sector problems and signs of reversal in the reform process."

For Brazil, threatened by a slow-down in exports and lower commodity prices, the fund lowered its 1998 estimate to 0.5 per cent from 1.5 per cent and its 1999 projection to minus one per cent from two per cent in October.

Overall, however, the outlook for the world economy has brightened in the last three months, which the IMF attributed to several policy actions:

— the easing of interest rates by the U.S. Federal Reserve and central banks in Canada and Europe

Brazilian authorities in mid-November to tackle the country's budget deficit, which paved the way for a \$41 billion loan package arranged by the IMF

— Japanese measures to stimulate demand and strengthen a banking system collapsing under the weight of bad loans

— continued stability and reform in crisis-hit Asian countries, where current account balances are now showing surpluses and confidence has returned to financial markets

— moves by the industrialised powers to enhance the financial clout of the IMF, enabling it to help countries counter the effects of weaknesses elsewhere in the global economy

But the near term is not without risk, the IMF cautioned, citing the continued low level of private capital flows to emerging markets, uncertainty in Japan, exchange rate gyrations, an increase in protectionism and a sharp stock market correction in the United States.

## Saudi Arabia tackles reality as boom ends with a bang

DUBAI (AFP) — For a country unaccustomed to economic openness, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah Ben Abdul Aziz's admission of financial turbulence to Gulf Arab leaders is little short of a watershed.

In what was the barbed-tongued speech, he warned "the age of abundance is over... We must all get used to a new lifestyle that does not rely entirely on the state."

For the kingdom's number two and de facto ruler to openly admit in such strong language to the end of an era was a first, even if everyone else has been saying it for months.

It was a sign that the once fabled petro-dollar economy and the world's largest oil producer was finally, under severe pressure, thinking the unthinkable.

Saudi Arabia is set to record a deficit this year of some \$12 billion or just under a third of total

expected revenue, according to the Saudi British Bank.

Immediate relief may come from local loans, according to Saudi newspaper Al Sharq Al Awsat which recently said the kingdom's banks have the capacity to lend the government some \$10 billion.

But this will only serve as a stop-gap until painful reforms can be implemented.

"The fiscal situation favours some innovative changes: increased fees and charges are not out of the question," a report from the bank said.

But in terms of government spending, "current expenditures are not likely to fall drastically," pushing the government into considering more privatisations, the bank said.

The kingdom recently announced the merging of four regional electricity companies under one roof

and plans to expand the private sector's participation.

The pressure for change is set to increase with crude oil prices fluctuating at low levels.

Even the six Gulf leaders' decision to roll over output cuts for an extra six months, maintaining some 1.285 million barrels off global daily production, did not boost the market significantly.

Figures from Arab Banking Corp. show Saudi Arabia relies on oil for about 70 per cent of its revenue.

The aftershocks of the oil collapse have been felt everywhere.

In another significant sign of the economic crunch, experts indicated that Saudi Arabia will extend foreign participation in its massive oil and gas sectors to European as well as U.S. companies.

"It is understood that European firms... would be invited to join in a second wave and upstream discussion," said Naji Abi Aad, a senior advisor at French-based Observatoire Méditerranéen de l'Energie.

The financial bite has also been seen elsewhere.

A new drive was launched to rid the kingdom of illegal foreigners in a bid to create more jobs for nationals.

The kingdom's banks too may feel the effects, with U.S. ratings agency Moody's Investors Service warning of asset quality problems unless the economic situation improves.

Many of those hard-hit are hoping that Prince Abdullah's speech, coming as it did after his oil talks in Washington, points to a new economic direction in the kingdom.

## Mahathir: Malaysian economy to shrink by at least six per cent

HANOI (AFP) — Malaysia's economy will shrink at least six per cent this year and capital controls will stay until a new international financial regime is put in place to deter "predatory speculators," Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has said.

Mahathir said here that the past year had been the "most difficult and challenging period" for the region.

"In Malaysia, we expect our gross domestic product (GDP) to decline by six per cent or more this year," said the 73-year-old premier, who has blamed international speculators for Asia's financial

woes.

"At the worst point of the crisis, the Malaysian ringgit was devalued by currency traders by some 60 per cent against the U.S. dollar while our stock market lost two-thirds of its capitalisation — more than \$200 billion."

"As a nation and a people, we have become impoverished. Our banks and corporations have collapsed," he emphasised.

Malaysia is mired in its first recession in 13 years, with GDP falling 8.6 per cent from a year earlier in the September quarter — its sharpest contraction on record and the

steepest fall among Asian economies except Indonesia in the same period.

Mahathir's latest forecast marked a downgrade of the central bank's prediction of 4.8 per cent economic contraction in 1998.

While maintaining its full-year forecast, the central bank said last month the economy was bottoming out and would grow 1.0 per cent next year. Mahathir kept up his attack on foreign currency speculators, saying the "existing international financial system is not equipped to deal with massive capital flight" under the current prolonged crisis.

But the Malaysian leader, a harsh critic of Western countries and multilateral lenders, said "powers that be preferred instead to blame the governments of the affected countries for all kinds of misdeeds."

"Instead of reining in the currency manipulators, they allowed them to destroy the economic tigers in order to force them to seek help and accept IMF prescribed reforms," he said.

Mahathir defended the imposition of currency controls in September as vital to "insulate ourselves from the predatory speculators."

"Malaysia cannot afford to wait while the developed economies and international financial institutions dawdle," he said. "We have no choice but to reimpose controls."

"Until the international community agrees on an international regime that will remove the kind of dangers we have been exposed to, we will have to continue with our controls," he stressed.

Under the controls, the ringgit was fixed at 3.80 to the dollar and made virtually non-convertible overseas, insulating the economy from market pressure and giving

the central bank room for lower interest rates.

Mahathir said Malaysia had initially followed "a virtual IMF approach" to combat its economic crisis, a reference to increased interest rates and tight credit policies prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

"We discovered that these measures worsened the economic situation," he said.

"And they failed to restore foreign confidence. As the international community refused to do anything, Malaysia had no choice but to change direction."

## Exchange Rates Monday, 21-12-98

CURRENCY	JORDAN DNR	SAUDI RIAL	UAE DIRHAM	BAHRAIN DNR	QATAR RIAL	OMAN RIAL	YEMEN RIAL	EGYPT POUND	LIBYAN DNR	ALGERIAN DNR	TUNISIAN DNR	MOROCCAN DNR	IRANIAN RIAL	PAKISTANI RUPEE	INDIAN RUPEE	RUSSIAN RUBLE	UK POUND	EURO
JORDAN DNR	1.0000	0.1882	0.1927	1.8778	1.8380	0.1844	2.3490	0.2077	0.1844	0.1844	0.1844	0.1844	0.1844	0.1844	0.1844	0.1844	0.1844	0.1844
SAUDI RIAL	5.3008	1.0000	1.0215	9.9541	9.7481	1.0306	12.4515	1.1010	1.0306	1.0306	1.0306	1.0306	1.0306	1.0306	1.0306	1.0306	1.0306	1.0306
UAE DIRHAM	5.1883	0.9790	1.0000	9.9446	9.7429	1.0089	12.1884	1.0776	1.0089	1.0089	1.0089	1.0089	1.0089	1.0089	1.0089	1.0089	1.0089	1.0089
BAHRAIN DNR	0.5325	0.1005	0.1026	1.0211	1.0000	0.1057	1.2773	0.1129	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057
QATAR RIAL	0.5438	0.1026	0.1048	1.0211	1.0000	0.1057	1.2773	0.1129	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057	0.1057
OMAN RIAL	5.1434	0.9703	0.9912	9.8594	9.6584	1.0000	12.0818	1.0683	0.9912	0.9912	0.9912	0.9912	0.9912	0.9912	0.9912	0.9912	0.9912	0.9912
YEMEN RIAL	0.4257	0.0803	0.0820	0.7984	0.7829	0.0828	1.0000	0.0884	0.0803	0.0803	0.0803	0.0803	0.0803	0.0803	0.0803	0.0803	0.0803	0.0803
EGYPT POUND	4.8145	0.9083	0.9278	9.0409	8.8538	0.9361	11.3092	1.0000	0.9083	0.9083	0.9083	0.9083	0.9083	0.9083	0.9083	0.9083	0.9083	0.9083
LIBYAN DNR	21.4821	4.0576	4.1399	40.3416	39.5065	4.1769	50.4828	4.4821	4.0576	4.0576	4.0576	4.0576	4.0576	4.0576	4.0576	4.0576	4.0576	4.0576
ALGERIAN DNR	1.4124	0.2665	0.2722	2.6523	2.5974	0.2748	3.3177	0.2934	0.2665	0.2665	0.2665	0.2665	0.2665	0.2665	0.2665	0.2665	0.2665	0.2665
TUNISIAN DNR	0.8369	0.1685	0.1619	1.5773	1.5446	0.1633	1.9730	0.1745	0.1685	0.1685	0.1685	0.1685	0.1685	0.1685	0.1685	0.1685	0.1685	0.1685
MOROCCAN DNR	2.3510	0.4435	0.4530	4.4148	4.3334	0.4571	5.5724	0.4882	0.4435	0.4435	0.4435	0.4435	0.4435	0.4435	0.4435	0.4435	0.4435	0.4435
IRANIAN RIAL	1.9081	0.3596	0.3673	3.5733	3.5052	0.3706	4.4773	0.3929	0.3596	0.3596	0.3596	0.3596	0.3596	0.3596	0.3596	0.3596	0.3596	0.3596
PAKISTANI RUPEE	7.8556	1.4879	1.5106	14.8078	14.5013	1.5332	18.5229	1.8379	1.4879	1.4879	1.4879	1.4879	1.4879	1.4879	1.4879	1.4879	1.4879	1.4879
INDIAN RUPEE	1.5309	0.3077	0.3143	3.0626	2.9992	0.3171	3.8910	0.3388	0.3077	0.3077	0.3077	0.3077	0.3077	0.3077	0.3077	0.3077	0.3077	0.3077
RUSSIAN RUBLE	2.6297	0.4989	0.5106	4.8787	4.7727	0.5152	5.2241	0.5504	0.4989	0.4989	0.4989	0.4989	0.4989	0.4989	0.4989	0.4989	0.4989	0.4989
UK POUND	11.2970	2.1372	2.1770	21.2140	20.7748	2.1964	26.5383	2.3484	2.1372	2.1372	2.1372	2.1372	2.1372	2.1372	2.1372	2.1372	2.1372	2.1372
EURO	23.2339	4.3925	4.4889	43.7233	42.8182	4.5270	54.8828	4.8382	4.3925	4.3925	4.3925	4.3925	4.3925	4.3925	4.3925	4.3925	4.3925	4.3925
YEMEN RIAL	48.4915	9.1478	9.3446	91.0691	89.1740	9.4280	113.9048	10.0715	9.1478	9.1478	9.1478	9.1478	9.1478	9.1478	9.1478	9.1478	9.1478	9.1478
EGYPT POUND	2.3932	0.4519	0.4611	4.2281	4.0997	0.4651	5.7372	0.4735	0.4519	0.4519	0.4519	0.4519	0.4519	0.4519	0.4519	0.4519	0.4519	0.4519
LIBYAN DNR	2.6336	0.5063	0.5171	5.0394	4.9351	0.5218	6.3037	0.5374	0.5063	0.5063	0.5063	0.5063	0.5063	0.5063	0.5063	0.5063	0.5063	0.5063
ALGERIAN DNR	16.5295	3.1202	3.1673	31.0585	30.4156	3.1871	38.8507	3.4853	3.1202	3.1202	3.1202	3.1202	3.1202	3.1202	3.1202	3.1202	3.1202	3.1202
TUNISIAN DNR	2.1870	0.4125	0.4214	4.1068	4.0218	0.4252	5.1372	0.4462	0.4125	0.4125	0.4125	0.4125	0.4125	0.4125	0.4125	0.4125	0.4125	0.4125
MOROCCAN DNR	1.1985	0.2287	0.2306	2.2488	2.2003	0.2328	2.8105	0.2485	0.2287	0.2287	0.2287	0.2287	0.2287	0.2287	0.2287	0.2287	0.2287	0.2287

CURRENCY	US DOLLAR	EURO	GERMAN MARK	FRANCE FRANC	UK POUND	YEMEN RIAL	LIBYAN DNR	ALGERIAN DNR	TUNISIAN DNR	MOROCCAN DNR	IRANIAN RIAL	PAKISTANI RUPEE	INDIAN RUPEE	RUSSIAN RUBLE	UK POUND	EURO
US DOLLAR	1.0000	1.8816	0.6008	0.7140	0.1081	0.8680	0.5330	0.6881	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000
EURO	0.5647	1.0000	0.3573	0.4407	0.1085	0.5150	0.3170	0.3874	0.7020	0.7020	0.7020	0.7020	0.7020	0.7020	0.7020	0.7020
GERMAN MARK	1.6645	2.7990	1.0000	1.2334	0.2681	1.4415	0.8873	1.0871	1.8846	1.8846	1.8846	1.8846	1.8846	1.8846	1.8846	1.8846
FRANCE FRANC	1.3485	2.2693	0.8105	1.0000	0.2417	1.1827	0.7163	0.8824	1.5925	1.5925	1.5925	1.5925	1.5925	1.5925	1.5925	1.5925
UK POUND	11.2970	18.7444	68.3722	65.9650	1.0000	61.8512	70.4550	136.3128	2.2146	2.2146	2.2146	2.2146	2.2146	2.2146	2.2146	2.2146
YEMEN RIAL	1.8780	3.1547	1.1271	1.3901	0.1380	1.0000	1.1000	1.1000	1.1000	1.1000	1.1000	1.1000	1.1000	1.1000	1.1000	1.1000
LIBYAN DNR	7.9883	13.4489	4.8052	5.9289	1.4326	5.9287	4.2936	4.8167	8.4420	8.4420	8.4420	8.4420	8.4420	8.4420	8.4420	8.4420
ALGERIAN DNR	16.4850	27.7212	9.8058	12.2158	2.9527	14.2784	8.7873	1.0000	19.4803	19.4803	19.4803	19.4803	19.4803	19.4803	19.4803	19.4803
TUNISIAN DNR	34.3230	57.7327	20.5280	25.4405	6.1484	29.7324	18.3008	208.2807	40.5280	40.5280	40.5280	40.5280	40.5280	40.5280	40.5280	40.5280
MOROCCAN DNR	1.6207	2.7254	0.9737	1.2010	0.2803	1.4036	0.8839	8.8318	1.9133	1.9133	1.9133	1.9133	1.9133	1.9133	1.9133	1.9133
IRANIAN RIAL	2.7653	4.7005	1.6794	2.0714	0.5007	2.4205	1.4800	18.9665	3.299	3.299	3.299	3.299	3.299	3.299	3.299	3.299
PAKISTANI RUPEE	1.9360	3.1650	1.1715	1.4078	0.4003	1.6454	1.0128	11.7128	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000
INDIAN RUPEE	16.8815	27.0251	9.8512	6.6773	2.0974	10.1412	6.3420	71.1111	6.3420	6.3420	6.3420	6.3420	6.3420	6.3420	6.3420	6.3420
RUSSIAN RUBLE	1.5494	2.8038	0.9038	1.1474	0.2373	1.3410	0.8254	9.9999	0.8254	0.8254	0.8254	0.8254	0.8254	0.8254	0.8254	0.8254
UK POUND	0.8471	1.4045	0.5008	0.6277	0.1517	0.7326	0.4515	5.5555	0.4515	0.4515	0.4515	0.4515	0.4515	0.4515	0.4515	0.4515



## Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

### UNDP seeks to set up regional office in Amman to cover activities in Arab countries

THE ADMINISTRATION of the New York based United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seeks to set up a regional office in Amman in cooperation with the Queen Alia Fund, said Fawaz Fokeladeh, director of the UNDP's Regional Bureau for Arab States. "The office will aim at formulating and building up the capabilities in the area of managing small loans so as it would become a pillar to support women in the Arab region," he said.

Noting that the management of small loans requires high capabilities in order to contribute to human development in the region, Fokeladeh indicated that the centre will be regional for the Arab states. "Some Arab financial parties have expressed readiness to finance the centre," he said.

According to senior UNDP official,

Saudi Prince Talal Ibn Abdul Aziz will contribute to supporting the establishment of the major centre in Amman and another in the Arab Maghreb. In this regard, Fokeladeh called on Arab financiers to participate in the development in order to create more job opportunities. He stressed that the Arab development should be financed by Arabs and not by the United Nations.

Fokeladeh pointed out that the financial allocations for the region was declining and that the focus will be now on quality in the various activities of the programme. He also revealed that the programme seeks to replace foreign expertise with Arab specialists and to cooperate with Arab, and not foreign, institutions in implementing various projects and activities (Al Dustour).

### Weavers complain of dumping cloths from Syria and South East Asia

IN A memorandum presented to the minister of industry and trade, the general association of owners of weaving industries outlined the problems faced by the sector and requested the help of the government to rectify the imbalances to ensure that the industries carry out their role in covering the needs of the local market and in exporting to outside market.

The association complained that Syrian products pose major competition to the 1000 weaving industries which have an overall capital of over JD100 million and employ more than 30,000 workers. According to the association, the Syrian products

are not imported by Jordanian traders but by clearing agents. In addition, the association said, there is wide smuggling operations of goods and cloths across the border.

The complaint also stated that goods from South East Asia are dumped on the local market, thus reducing the opportunities for Jordanian industries to compete. "The clothes come at very cheap prices as their cost is much lower than that in Jordan due to the fact that the raw materials are available in the countries of origin," the association said. "Furthermore, the labour costs are low and governments there extend support to exports" (Al Dustour).

### U.S. pork farmers facing crisis

WASHINGTON (R) — U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said this week his agency would create a "pork crisis" task force to help U.S. farmers who are facing the lowest pork prices since World War II.

Farmers in southern Minnesota and parts of Iowa were receiving just \$8.50 per hundredweight for their hogs this week — the lowest price since 1941.

The U.S. Agriculture Department (USDA) also will speed up its purchases of pork products for federal feeding programmes, expedite a U.S. food aid shipment of 50,000 tonnes of pork destined for Russia, and include pork in up to \$1 billion of export credits extended to South Korea, Glickman said in a year-end news conference.

With market prices below the cost of raising pigs, the pork industry has warned that the dire economic situation could bring protests at Midwestern slaughter plants and widespread bankruptcies.

Earlier this week, a group of farmers in southwestern Iowa announced they would invite hunters to chase hogs across 240 acres of woodland and shoot them. With market prices so low, the farmers said they were better off having sportsmen pay to hunt them.

U.S. hog prices paid to farmers have dropped 70 per cent over the past year, causing a "catastrophic problem" for many producers, Glickman said.

At the same time, retail prices have barely budged, prompting Glickman to announce he would investigate concentration in the slaughter industry with antitrust experts from the Federal Trade Commission and the Justice Department.

"We have not seen the response at the retail level," Glickman told reporters. "I want to know why."

The problem of plunging prices has been blamed on a slump in pork exports to Asia and Russia, and on Canadian farmers who are adding to the logjam at U.S. slaughter plants by sending large numbers of live hogs across the border.

To help boost prices, Glickman said he would create a crisis task force to recommend policy changes.

Farmers have asked for a loan guarantee programme, humanitarian donations of 300,000 live pigs to burma-stricken Central America, and an anti-dumping investigation into Canada's hog industry.

### Brent hits lowest level for 12 years as Iraqi oil continues to flow

LONDON (AFP) — Brent North Sea crude prices fell to their lowest level for 12 years on the London market late Monday and were trading well below \$10 a barrel, after the United States and Britain called off air strikes against Iraq.

Iraq insisted that its oil exports had not been affected by the four-day Anglo-U.S. bombardment.

Brent for February delivery on the International Petroleum Exchange (IPE) fell to an intra-day low of \$9.55 a barrel, the lowest level yet seen since crude contracts

were first quoted on the IPE on June 23, 1988.

On the open market, however, prices did fall in July 1986 to \$8.50.

Prices picked up to \$9.76 a barrel in late afternoon trading on the IPE Monday, but this was still well below an opening price of \$9.95 and a closing price of \$9.99 last Friday.

Crude prices fell despite the four nights of heavy air raids against Iraq, as dealers saw no sign of a slowdown in Iraqi exports.

Iraq's oil ministry said

that oil exports have not been disrupted by the bombing.

An analyst at Credit Lyonnais Rouse trading house, Tony Machacek, said: "It is difficult to see who is going to come on to the market and support prices."

He said that there were "no signs of OPEC wishing to make any cutback" to production levels.

The oil market has been swamped by over-supply, particularly as members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries persistently flout their

own cartel's production ceilings.

Meanwhile, demand from key consumers in Asia and the United States is extremely low.

On Saturday, Iraq reported that an oil refinery and oil installations south of Basra, southern Iraq, had been bombed.

The United States and Britain justified the attacks by saying that crude exports that contravened Iraq's oil-for-food deal with the United Nations had been shipped from there.

### Up to 70% of Chinese trust firms to close — study

BEIJING (AFP) — Up to 70 per cent of China's ailing trust and investment firms, better known as ITICs, will close under a law being drafted to define their activities, a report has said.

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) report said the new law which is expected to be unveiled soon will "hasten the demise of 70 per cent of the 240 existing firms," an "amorphous breed" of non-bank financial institutions.

The EIU said the government's motivation for closing down or merging most of the ITICs reflected its primary concern which was for the safety and development of domestic companies.

Jacqueline Wiles, the author of the report, said: "It is our assessment that the government is not unrealistic about domestic conditions and the prospect for market consolidation should be viewed with guarded optimism."

"The fact that this evolution in (non-bank financial institutions) is being engineered may be unnerving to those used to a Darwinian system of competitive survival, but any move toward greater stability should perhaps be welcomed," she added.

The Chinese government signaled a major consolidation of ITICs when it

ordered the closure of Guangdong International Trust and Investment Corp. last month.

The report said the rise of economic czar Zhu Rongji to the position of prime minister had been central to the changes planned throughout the financial system.

It has been widely reported that Zhu was personally involved in the closure of GITIC and was behind the push to make the watchdog China Securities Regulatory Commission the sole securities regulator.

The EIU predicted that the securities industry would also undergo changes.

"The need for bigger, more stable brokerages and investment banks is clear, and this will likely be effected through consolidation of the hundreds of small brokers now in the securities market," it said.

More than 450 companies and institutions have become involved in the securities brokerage business since the Chinese stock markets were launched in 1990.

As of early this year, there were about 100 brokerages but only seven had registered capital of one billion yuan (\$121 million) and only four had existed in the current form before 1996.

### G.E. raises dividend 17%

FAIRFIELD, Conn. (R) — General Electric Co., pleased with 1998 results and confident 1999 will be a record year, has said its board raised the quarterly dividend by 17 per cent, to 35 cents a share.

G.E., a conglomerate whose businesses include

light bulbs, jet engines, finance and even NBC-TV, said raising the dividend was related to strong earnings and cash flow in 1998, and added it sees many future growth opportunities, particularly in Asia.

A.F.M. TRADE Monday, 21-12-98			
ACCESS 4646868			
Company	Open Price	Close Price	Change
<b>BANKS</b>			
ARAB BK	215.000	213.000	-0.93%
NTL BK	1.550	1.530	-1.29%
CAIRO AMMAN BK	2.440	2.560	+4.92%
IBK OF JO	1.350	1.330	-1.48%
THE HOUSING BK	2.700	2.700	0.00%
JO. GULF BK	0.850	0.870	+2.35%
UNION BK	1.020	1.070	+4.90%
JO. INVEST. & FIN. BK	1.450	1.450	0.00%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.570	0.570	0.00%
<b>BANKS INDEX</b>	278.320		point = -0.75%
<b>SERVICES</b>			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.450	1.450	0.00%
ARAB INT'L HOTELS	4.750	4.750	0.00%
JO. INT'L TRADING CENT	0.310	0.300	-3.23%
AL-KAT	5.400	5.300	-1.85%
COMMODORE	1.190	1.190	0.00%
ARAB INT'L FOR INVEST.	1.930	1.920	-0.52%
UNIFIED L&O TRANS	1.120	1.120	0.00%
UNITED FOR FINANCIAL I	1.070	1.110	+3.74%
<b>SERVICES INDEX</b>	106.310		point = -0.28%
<b>INDUSTRY</b>			
CEMENT	3.150	3.120	-0.95%
PHOSPHATE	1.490	1.490	0.00%
ARAB FERTILISER	3.000	3.000	0.00%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.150	10.150	0.00%
WOOLLEN IND	1.140	1.200	+5.26%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	2.580	2.550	-1.16%
CERAMIC IND	1.110	1.110	0.00%
JO. DAIRY	2.800	2.850	+1.79%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.230	1.220	-0.81%
PAPER & CARDBOARD	2.040	2.000	-1.96%
THE PUBLIC MINING	1.680	1.750	+4.17%
DAR AL DAWA	4.980	4.970	-0.20%
MIDDLE EAST COMPLEX	0.560	0.550	-1.79%
JO. STEEL	0.980	0.990	+1.02%
PETROL - CHEMICAL	0.270	0.350	+2.97%
ROCKWOOL	0.340	0.350	+2.94%
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL	1.150	1.120	-2.61%
SULPHUR - CHEMICALS	0.390	0.390	0.00%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1.180	1.170	-0.85%
KAWTHER	0.410	0.380	-7.32%
EL-ZAY	1.270	1.280	+0.79%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0.630	0.620	-1.59%
FOOD FACTORIES	0.950	1.000	+5.26%
IND. RESOURCES	0.470	0.460	-2.13%
NEW CAPLES	0.620	0.620	0.00%
NTL ALUMINIUM	0.700	0.700	0.00%
<b>INDUSTRY INDEX</b>	78.040		point = -0.38%
<b>PARALLEL</b>			
EXPORT BK (75	0.860	0.860	0.00%
ARAB GERMAN INS	1.000	1.000	0.00%
JO. TRADING FACILITIES	0.380	0.390	+2.63%
CENTRAL STORG	0.330	0.350	+6.06%
JO. INT'L INS	0.670	0.700	+4.48%
UNION INVEST. CORP.	0.700	0.700	0.00%
ADVANCED PHAR	0.550	0.550	0.00%
AL - SHARQ	0.950	0.950	0.00%
MEDICAL APPLIANCES	0.360	0.380	+5.56%
ARAB INT'L TRADE	0.230	0.220	-4.35%
OPTICAL & ADJUAL	0.470	0.480	+2.13%
CENTURY	1.200	1.180	-1.67%
NAMICO	0.270	0.270	0.00%
TEXTILE & PLASTIC	0.250	0.250	0.00%
AL-RAZ	0.650	0.630	-3.08%
ARMED ENG. IND	0.210	0.210	0.00%
INT'L CERAMIC	0.400	0.390	-2.50%
INT'L TEXTILE MANU	0.190	0.190	0.00%
ZARA	1.200	1.200	0.00%
INT'L DAK	0.710	0.690	-2.82%
ARAB JO. INVEST	0.830	0.830	0.00%
<b>GRAND INDEX</b>	168.98		point = -0.63%

### HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

**ARIES:** (March 21 to April 19) If a friend suggests you try for a promotion or a better job, take the advice. Your big break will come secondhand, so make sure people know what you want. With enough of them out there looking, your chances for success increase enormously. You'll still have to do the work, but you know you have support, and that's energizing.

**Taurus:** (April 20 to May 20) There's going to be a pop quiz today. Don't worry. You either know the answers already or you've got a friend who does. Its not cheating to ask for help. In fact, that could be part of the assignment. Don't try to do everything by yourself. Delegate chores and manage the results, and a great time will be had by all.

**GEMINI:** (May 21 to June 21) You've got great ideas, but you may not have quite enough resources to do what you'd like. Why not get your partner to help? It might take a while to persuade that person to see things from your point of view, but it would be time well spent. If you're convincing enough, you might even get him or her to pay for it.

**CANCER:** (June 22 to July 22) You've had a dilemma lately, but that's OK. A little tension is stimulating, and today you could come up with a marvellous idea — something you've never tried. There's work involved, but teamwork is the most important part of this equation. Cut down on the amount of money you spend by increasing the amount imagination.

**LEO:** (July 23 to August 22) Opposites attract, and you could find yourself strongly attracted to an opposite type. Even more wonderful, that person thinks you look pretty good, too. You two have quite a bit to offer to each other, so trading is a good way to develop the relationship or maintain it. Listen to what this other person has to say.

**VIRGO:** (August 23 to September 22) It's a tough job, but somebody's got to do it, and you're elected. You've got to set a good example to the others as well as keep up with a hectic pace. And you've got to have a good time while you're at it. Too much to do? Not even. You are fabulous at this sort of assignment.

**LIBRA:** (September 23 to October 23) A person you love will give you some excellent advice today. It may be a little difficult to understand at first, but put in the effort. Then take the action. People are watching to see what you're going to do next, but with that strong partnership you've developed, you can't lose.

**SCORPIO:** (October 24 to November 21) Looks like somebody disagrees with you on a very basic level. Try to be open-minded. You don't have to agree, but if you listen and simply say back what this person says to you, it'll make a difference. You'll stop quarrelling and start respecting each other more. And that might be the best you can do.

**SAGITTARIUS:** (November 22 to December 21) You're a very lucky person, and you may have thought your wealth depended on that. Actually, its due to the effort you put in. Of course, you make it look easy, right? Well, today your job may actually turn out that way, especially if you set your mind to it.

**CAPRICORN:** (December 22 to January 19) You could get a gift today that's more than you ever expected. Even more interesting, it could come from a person you didn't think you liked. Ignore past differences and minor quarrels. You might as well ignore some major quarrels, too. If you can forgive somebody who doesn't deserve it, you'll have given the biggest gift of all.

**AQUARIUS:** (January 20 to February 18) A problem could have you stymied today, but don't know how to do, and that's why you're floundering. Ask for help. Talk to a person who has successfully accomplished what you're trying to do. Even better, talk to somebody who thinks its easy.

**PISCES:** (February 19 to March 20) Stay out of an argument between friends, but do provide a shoulder for either of them to cry on. Listen completely and fully to what each person has to say, and repeat it back to them. They might even figure out how silly they're being, and that would be the way to heal this hurt.

Birth Stone of December: Turquoise — Zircon

### Thomson-CSF to slash 4,000 jobs in radical restructuring

PARIS (AFP) — Thomson-CSF, Europe's biggest defence electronics group, is to slash some 4,000 jobs as part of a three-year restructuring plan aimed at making the group more competitive, the company has announced.

The goal is to boost profitability by bringing it into line with that of the group's Anglo-Saxon rivals. However the immediate result will be to plunge the group's balance sheet into the red for 1998, with a net loss "of around 1.5 billion francs," Thomson-CSF president Denis Ranque told the board of directors. He said the decision had been taken to incorporate in the 1998 accounts the entire "special reserve" of some three billion francs which the company intends to use to finance the restructuring.

Thomson-CSF achieved a net profit of 276 million francs (\$49 million) in the first half of 1998, a decline of 50 per cent — for a turnover of 16.5 billion francs. In 1997, the group made a net profit of 2.1 billion francs with a turnover of 38.5 billion francs. This was largely due to a strong surge in the value of SGS-Thomson prior to privatisation.

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# Maier leads sensational Austrian sweep

PATSCHERKOFEL (AP) — Double Olympic champion Hermann Maier led a historical Austrian sweep of the top nine places in Monday's World Cup Super-G at the legendary Patscherkofel course.

Never before in World Cup history skiers from the same country had finished 1-9 in men's or women's races.

Maier's victory and the team triumph at the home course which hosted the 1976 Olympics definitely restored the prestige of Austria's "Power Team" coming from three consecutive setbacks.

"The Herminator" clocked an unbeatable time of one minute, 23.52 seconds down the 1,947-meter long course, dropping 570 metres.

Christian Mayer and Fritz Strobl placed second and third respectively for the all-Austrian podium in the third super giant slalom race of the season.

Mayer trailed the winner by 0.76 seconds. Strobl was one hundredth of a second back.

The race, started 65 minutes late because fog had initially hampered visibility, looked like the Austrian national championships as also late starters such as Patrick Wirth and Werner Franz beat skiers from the "rest of the world" for the sensational 1-9 finish.

The previous best team showing dated back to 1968, when French women finished 1-6 in a downhill race at Abetone, Italy.

Austrian skiers already had swept the top five places in a Super-G at Aspen, Colo., last month.

Norway's Lasse Paulsen was the first of the non-Austrian finishers in tenth place, with an impressive gap of 1.01 seconds.

Maier's third season victory — the 13th of his World Cup career — vaulted the strongly-built Austrian skier atop the overall standings with 540 points after 12 races.

Norway's Lasse Kjus, who had entered Monday's race as overall leader, slipped to second place.

Maier, twice fourth in the two previous races in Val Gardena and Alta Badia, made acrobatics to avoid a spill at mid course, when he hit the snow with a hand while clearing a gate.

"It was a sensational race for me and for the team. We need more races like this ... I skied miles away from the ideal line and I struggled to win on this track, as Klammer did to achieve his Olympic victory," Maier said.

Franz Klammer, who won the Olympic downhill title at this course, was at the finish line to congratulate his fellow-countrymen for their impressive showing.

The home skiers were cheered by a huge crowd, including hundreds of children as classes in the Innsbruck area were closed for the race.

"The course was perfect, and the fans gave me a big boost," Maier said.

The men's World Cup continues at Bormio, northern Italy, with a downhill on Dec. 29.

## Patriots stun 49ers

FOXBORO, Massachusetts (AP) — Adam Vinatieri's 35-yard field goal with three seconds left gave the New England Patriots a spot in the NFL playoffs and a 24-21 upset victory Sunday over the San Francisco 49ers.

Scott Zolak, making his first start in three years for the injured Drew Bledsoe, matched Steve Young's two touchdown passes, but outdid him in the fourth quarter. The eight-year veteran led the Patriots back from a 21-14 deficit with two scoring drives in the last eight minutes.

The victory and Tennessee's loss to Green Bay clinched a wild-card berth for New England (9-6). The playoff-bound 49ers (11-4) ended their four-game winning streak.

Packers 30, Oilers 22: In Greco Bay, Wisconsin, Brett Favre and Antonio Freeman connected on three long touchdown plays as Green Bay beat Tennessee on a snowy day and a slippery field.

The Oilers (8-7) saw their playoff hopes dim. The Oilers must beat Minnesota next week and hope New England loses its season finale and Miami loses its last two games beginning Monday night against Denver.

The Packers, who clinched their sixth straight playoff berth Saturday night when Washington beat Tampa Bay, improved to 10-5, winning consecutive games for the first time in nearly two months.

Bengals 25, Steelers 24: In Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, losers of nine in a row, blew a 13-point lead, but rallied to eliminate Pittsburgh from playoff contention behind Jeff Blake's 367 yards passing and a touchdown.

Blake found Danay Scott behind Lee Flowers and Carnell Lake for a 61-yard touchdown pass in the third quarter, and Doug Pelfrey, whose heady play allowed him to kick a field goal just before halftime, woo it with a 21-yard field goal — his fourth of the game — with 5:12 remaining.

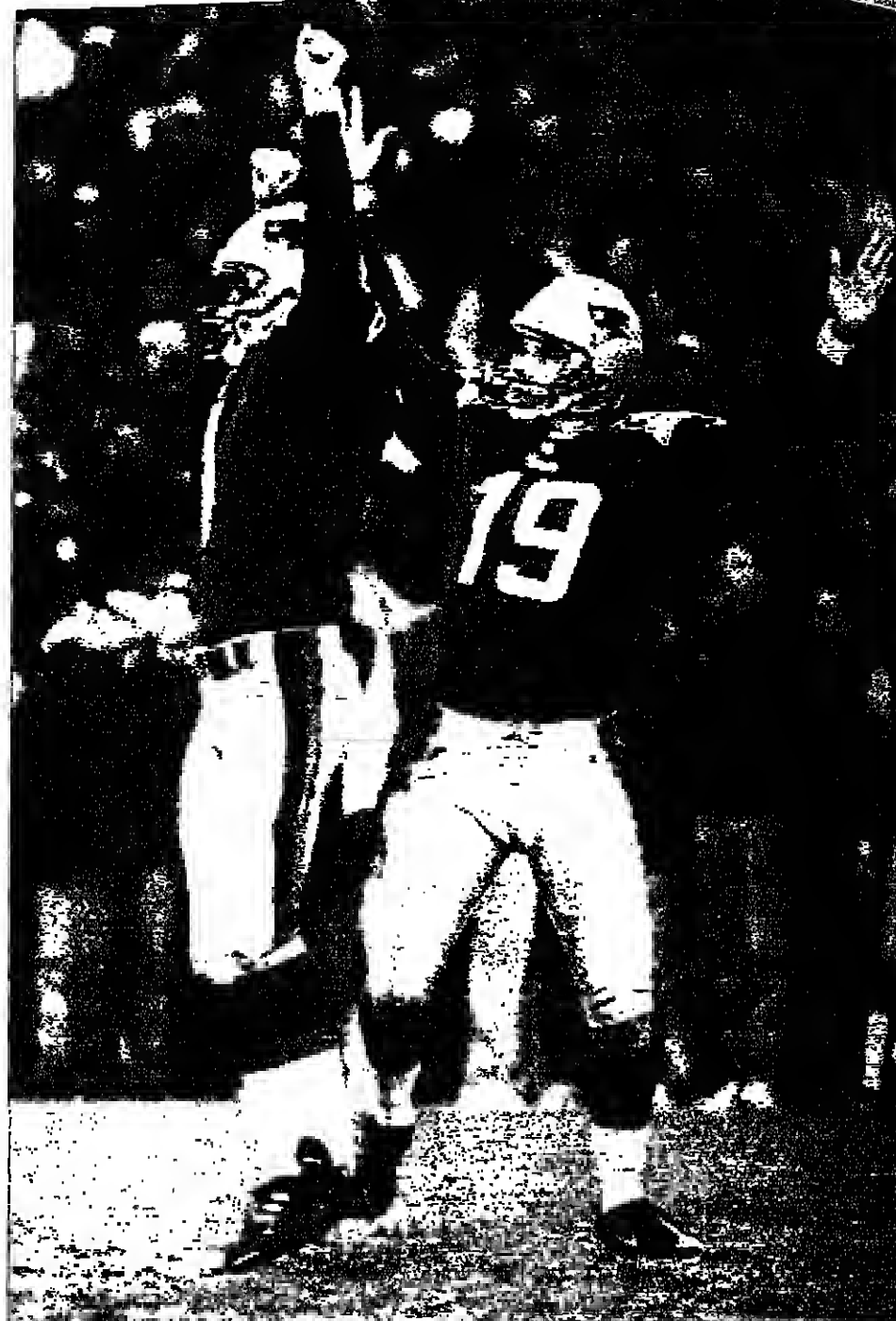
The Bengals (3-12) have two of their three victories this season over Pittsburgh, including a 25-20 win on Oct. 11 that was their last until Sunday. They now can finish no worse than 3-13, which would only match the franchise record for their worst season.

Steelers quarterback Kordell Stewart, who threw a temper tantrum when he was pulled from last week's 16-3 loss in Tampa, was benched again after passing for only 30 yards in the first half as the Steelers (7-8) lost their fourth in a row.

Giants 28, Chiefs 7: In East Rutherford, New Jersey, Kent Graham threw for a touchdown and ran for another as New York continued its late-season turnaround by beating Kansas City.

Percy Ellsworth led the defensive effort by returning one of his two interceptions 43 yards for an early score. The Giants (7-8), who had a total of four interceptions, won their third straight game and for the fourth time in five games since Graham replaced Danny Kanell as the starting quarterback.

Coach Dan Reeves, who was released from an



New England Patriots place kicker Adam Vinatieri (L) and holder of Tom Tupa (R) celebrate as their field goal attempt from 35 yards away goes through the uprights with six seconds left in the game to beat the San Francisco 49ers 24-21 in Foxboro (Reuters photo)

To make the playoffs for a second straight year, New York has to win in Philadelphia next week, Tampa Bay (7-8) must lose in Cincinnati and Arizona must lose next week.

Panthers 20, Rams 13: In Charlotte, North Carolina, Steve Beuerlein's 68-yard touchdown pass to backup tight end Luther Broughton with 2:44 left gave Carolina its third victory of the season.

It marked the first time in 11 games this season that Carolina (3-12) won after trailing after three quarters. Beuerlein threw for 193 yards and two touchdowns, and the Panthers forced four St. Louis turnovers and converted them into 10 points.

St. Louis (4-11) fell to 0-7 against NFC West opponents this season.

Bears 24, Ravens 3: In Chicago, third-string tailback James Allen, making his first NFL start, did what first-round pick Curtis Enis and veteran Edgar Bennett could not do for Chicago this season — rush for 100 yards.

Allen got 135 of his 163 yards in the first half with bursts of 57 and 54 yards as the Bears routed Baltimore to end a six-game losing streak.

In a game certain to have an impact on the coaching futures of Baltimore's Ted Marchibroda and Chicago's Dave Wannstedt, the Bears (4-11) bolted to a 24-0 halftime lead.

Falcons 24, Lions 17: In Detroit, Jamal Anderson rushed for 147 yards and scored two touchdowns as Atlanta clinched its first NFC West title in 18 years and a first-round bye in the playoffs.

It was just the second division title in team history for the Falcons (13-2), who set a club record for victories in a season.

The Falcons have won eight in a row and 11 of their last 12.

Coach Dan Reeves, who was released from an

Atlanta hospital Friday after quadruple heart bypass surgery, missed the game but is expected back in time for the playoffs. But he wasn't needed as the Falcons, with defensive coordinator Rich Brooks acting as coach, fought back from a 17-10 third-quarter deficit with two touchdowns in the fourth quarter against Detroit (5-10).

Watters, who set a career high with 178 yards on 32 carries, scored on a 33-yard run with 9:19 to go to close Seattle to 23-17.

Then Phillip Daniels caused Marshall Faulk to fumble, and Springs picked up the bouncing ball and ran 14 yards to the end zone.

Todd Peterson added a 30-yard field goal with 1:57 left to finish the scoring.

Raiders 17, Chargers 10: In San Diego, Wade Wilson, making just his third start since 1996, threw touchdown passes to James Jett and Tim Brown on consecutive possessions in the second quarter, lifting Oakland past San Diego.

The Raiders (8-7) soaped a four-game losing streak, but the victory came much too late, and Oakland will miss the playoffs for the fifth straight season.

Chargers (5-10) lost their fourth straight game.

Panthers 20, Rams 13: In Charlotte, North Carolina, Steve Beuerlein's 68-yard touchdown pass to backup tight end Luther Broughton with 2:44 left gave Carolina its third victory of the season.

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## Bierhoff to miss U.S. Tour

FRANKFURT (AP) — Captain Oliver Bierhoff will miss Germany's United States tour in February because of club commitments in Italy, coach Erich Ribbeck said Monday.

During their 10-day trip to Florida, the Germans will play the United States on Feb. 6 in Jacksonville and Colombia on Feb. 9 in Miami.

Bierhoff, Germany's top striker who became captain after this summer's World Cup, and defensive midfielder Joerg Heinrich are unavailable because their Italian clubs clash in a top Serie A game while the German team is in the United States. Bierhoff plays for AC Milan, Heinrich for Fiorentina.

Ribbeck announced a 26-man squad that will be reduced to 20 or 22 men before the team leaves for Florida.

Bayern Munich, the runaway Bundesliga leader, provides the bulk of the squad, with seven players. But its eccentric midfielder Mario Basler was dropped.

"I talked to him and I told him why he wasn't coming with us," Ribbeck said. "It doesn't mean that he is out of the team forever."

Ribbeck declined to name his reasons for dropping Basler, whose late-night escapades make regular headlines in Germany.

Two rookies have been invited, 31-year-old striker Michael Preetz of Hertha Berlin and midfielder Bernd Schneider.

Two others, midfielders Marco Reich and Michael Ballack of Bundesliga champion Kaiserslautern, have been invited before but have not played a game yet for Germany.

The veteran is Lothar Matthaus, the 37-year-old Bayern libero who has 130 national team games.

"Not the youngest but the best should play and Preetz is the leading German-born striker in the Bundesliga," Ribbeck said.

With 11 goals, Preetz shares the lead with Brazilian star Giovane Elber of Bayern Munich and Andrzej Juskowiak, Wolfsburg's Polish forward.

Juergen Klinsmann, Germany's former captain who retired after the World Cup, will be honored before the game with the United States in an official farewell ceremony.

## Bergkamp stars as Arsenal downs Leeds 3-1

LONDON (AP) — Dennis Bergkamp scored one goal and set up two more for French World Cup stars Patrick Vieira and Emmanuel Petit as defending titlist Arsenal downed Leeds 3-1 Sunday in the Premier League.

The result meant that Arsenal moved up one place to sixth, behind Leeds on goal difference and four points behind leader Chelsea, who moved top on Saturday by downing Leicester 2-0.

Bergkamp's 28th minute strike had an element of good fortune.

There was a strong hint of offside when Petit floated a

pass forward to Nicolas Anelka whose header on put the Dutchman clear. Bergkamp only had goalkeeper Nigel Martyn to beat but he mis-hit the shot and the ball went off the side of his head into the net.

There was nothing fortunate about Vieira's strike eight minutes into the second half when he took Bergkamp's through ball and, shrugged off a challenge and fired the ball home with his left foot.

Leeds bit back in the 66th minute when Dutch striker Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink fired a low right footer between Arsenal's Austrian goalkeeper, Alex

Manninger, and the post from a layoff by Australian forward Harry Kewell.

Four minutes from the end Bergkamp set up Petit with another well-timed pass from deep which split the Leeds defence and the French midfielder fired home first time with his right foot.

Arsenal substitute Gilles Grimandi, who had been on the field for barely 15 minutes, was expelled by referee Paul Durkin for head-butting Leeds Alan Smith when the two flared up in midfield.

## Bremen beats Berlin as Bundesliga breaks off for winter

FRANKFURT (AP) — Rade Bogdanovic scored late in the first half-time and early in the second to secure Werder Bremen's 2-1 victory Sunday over Hertha Berlin in the last Bundesliga game before the winter break.

After missing three opportunities earlier in the match, Bogdanovic found the target in the final minute of the first half-time.

Michael Preetz brought his season total to 11 in the 47th, heading in a cross to level the score for Hertha.

As Bremen took the ball from the center, Andreas Herzog found Bogdanovic in Hertha's penalty area and the Yugoslav struck again, restoring Bremen's lead after 45 seconds.

Bogdanovic now has seven goals for Bremen, which jumped from 12th to 9th. Berlin had its run of four consecutive wins snapped by a determined Bremen team, which gave 28,000 fans its best performance of the season.



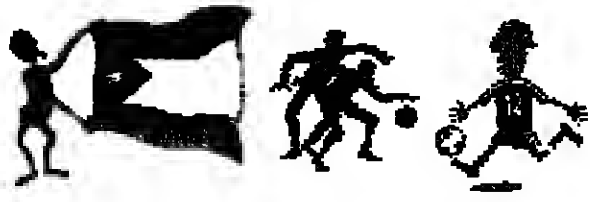
Ander Garitano (R) of Real Zaragoza jumps over a tackle by Atletico Madrid's Carlos Aguilera (L) in a Liga match at Vicente Calderon stadium in Madrid 20 December. The game ended scoreless (AFP photo)

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						Shows: 2:15, 8:30							

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## LOCAL SPORTS SCENE



## Only 9 countries confirmed for Pan-Arab Games

AMMAN — Egypt, Iraq, Algeria, Syria, Morocco, Sudan, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are the only countries that has confirmed participation in the Pan-Arab Games, which will be held here Aug. 15-31, 1999. Games Director Isam Aridah said he had sent a third notification of Arab Olympic Committees to confirm their official stand since the original final date was Nov. 15. Meanwhile, work is underway on providing necessary administrative and technical equipment to the Games' headquarters.

## Friendly basketball match at Orthodox Club tonight

AMMAN — The Kingdom's basketball fans tonight have the chance to enjoy the country's top players battling it out in a friendly match organised by The Jordan Environment Society under the theme of "raising awareness about the water situation in the country." A joint team of players from Al Ahli and Al Orthodox Clubs will face a group of national team players. The joint team includes players Hilal Barakat, Yousef Zaghloul, Fadi Saqqa, Nasser Basam, Ayman Du'eis, Ashraf Samara, Mohammad Sbamali and Riyad Aysb. The national team is led by Jan Sahlieh, Muntaser Ahul Tayyeb and Nihad Madi. The match will be held at the Orthodox Club's Emil Haddad court.

## Honda may return to Formula One in 2000

TOKYO (AP) — No. 3 Japanese automaker Honda said Monday it is considering returning to Formula One racing in 2000, sending it back to the world circuit after it left six years ago because of rising costs. "We have started test runs for a car in preparation for participation in the Formula One, possibly (in) 2000," said Hiroyuki Yoshino, president of Honda Motor, at a news conference in Tokyo. Yoshino said Honda has designed and built a prototype car with its own engine and tested it on the outskirts of Milan, Italy, on Dec. 15. He declined to comment on the car's performance, but said Honda will continue with more testing next year. Honda first entered Formula One competition in 1964 but pulled out four years later. After returning in 1984, Honda supplied engines to McLaren and Williams, who with the Japanese engines won which won every constructors' and drivers title from 1986 to 1991.

Second Division Basketball Championship  
Last two teams pull out as only one match remains

By a Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The last two teams at the bottom of the eight-team Second Division Basketball Championship standings Monday announced that they would not be playing their final matches which were scheduled for Tuesday.

According to regulations, both declining clubs, Al Rayeh and Samma, are regarded as having lost 20-0. However, since there is no relegation to a third division, that did not have much bearing on the standings. One match remains on this year's calendar as the championship concludes following the Christmas holiday on Dec. 26.

For the championship's top two teams, which will be promoted to the First Division next year, the tournament is a more serious business than for the rest of their opponents.

This year, the Jordan Basketball Federation (JBF) decided that two instead of one team will be promoted

STANDINGS					
Team	P	W	L	SP	SA
Homentmen	7	6	1	469	382
Wihdat	6	5	1	670	378
Fuheis	5	4	1	463	379
Ebbin	4	4	1	463	406
Ashrafieh	3	3	1	463	388
Abu Nusair	2	2	1	343	421
Rayeh	1	1	6	322	474
Samma	1	1	6	322	485

making the total number of First Division teams eight instead of six.

Homentmen top the standings for now. They have concluded all their matches and are likely to end up in runner up spot.

They are assured of returning to the country's premier division after the absence of three years provided Al Wihdat do not lose their last match.

Al Wihdat are second for now but seem favoured to win their Dec. 26 match against Al Fuheis which will give them the division title and move with Homentmen

to the First Division.

The only unbeaten team of the competition, Al Wihdat, scored all their wins easily passing the 100-mark. Led by coach Ghaith Al Najjar who previously trained Al Ahli, the Kingdom's soccer champion club is playing in the Second Division for only the second year.

Al Fuheis are third awaiting their match against Al Wihdat which they must win to have a slim chance of qualifying instead of Homentmen to whom they lost 49-44.

Missing from the event is Al Watani, a former First Division team who were re-

legated but failed to participate this year.

Also missing are teams like Gazet Hashem, Karak and Sahab.

The JBF this year organised only three other events: the First Division and the Under-14 won by Al Orthodox, and the Under-16 won by Al Jazireh.

The women's, juniors, and Under-22 were cancelled while the JBF is discussing holding the Under-18 with the concerned clubs. The First Division includes Al Orthodox, Al Ahli, Al Jazireh, Al Jalil, Al Hussein and Al Jeel.

## Perugia hold Fiorentina to draw

ROME (AP) — Japan's Hidetoshi Nakata slotted in a penalty kick in the 95th minute of play Sunday to give Perugia a dramatic 2-2 draw against Fiorentina, cutting the Serie A leader's advantage to three standings points heading into the winter break.

Before Nakata's heroics, made possible when Spanish midfielder Martinez Amor used his hand to knock down a cross in the penalty area during the dying seconds of injury time, Fiorentina looked headed for another victory thanks to Gabriel Batistuta's exploits.

The Argentine star gave the visitors a 2-1 lead with 17 minutes left by netting a header for his league-best 14th goal in as many games. Fiorentina had won two straight 1-0 games on second-half Batistuta goals.

But ninth-place Perugia, which led 20 seconds into the match on Croat striker Milan Rapajic's header, pressed forward.

Nakata, the second Japanese player in the Italian League, calmly hit the equalizer for his seventh goal of the season.

AC Parma moved up to second place by beating Empoli 5-3 as Diego Fuser tallied two goals and two assists.

AC Milan is third after a 2-2 draw against Sampdoria of Genoa, whose new coach, former England captain David Platt, watched from the stands. Argentine playmaker Ariel Ortega, back from a drunk driving suspension, curled in a penalty kick with four minutes remaining to tie the score for Sampdoria.

Fiorentina (9-2-3), alone in first place for the first time since 1982, leads the table with 29 points. Parma follows with 26, and Milan has 25.

Defending champion Juventus of Turin (6-3-5), tied for sixth with 21 points, snapped a three-game losing streak and ended a club-record goal drought by beating Salernitana 3-0 on striker Filippo Inzaghi's hat-trick. Before Inzaghi found the target, Juve's goalless stretch reached 511 minutes, 5 more than the club went without scoring in



Internazionale of Milan Brazilian star Ronaldo, grimaces after an hard contact with a Roma's defender, during Italian first division match, at the Milan's San Siro stadium (AP photo)

the 1967-68 season.

French World Cup hero Zinedine Zidane, expected to collect all the major player of the year awards, assisted on Inzaghi's first two goals.

Elsewhere, Chilean striker Marcelo Salas scored twice to lead Lazio of Rome past Udinese 3-1; veteran Giuseppe Signori's free kick gave Bologna a 1-0 win at Cagliari; Piacenza edged Bari 3-2; and Vicenza and Venezia drew 0-0.

At night, Ronaldo's Internazionale of Milan hosted Francesco Totti's AS Roma. The league now takes more than two weeks off, and action resumes Jan. 6 with a rare slate of Wednesday games.

Perugia 2, Fiorentina 2: At Perugia, the hosts took the early lead when Rapajic met Brazilian defender Ze Maria's cross to net his sixth goal. Fiorentina equalised 10 minutes later when Anselmo Robbiati, making a rare start because Brazil's Edmundo was suspended, tucked a free kick under the crossbar from the edge of the penalty area.

Batistuta, trying to become the fifth player in the last 20 years to lead the league in scoring while playing for a title winner, then put Fiorentina ahead by nodding home Belgian winger Luis Oliveira's pass.

Perugia, which was in Serie B last season, is 5-4-5.

Parma 5, Empoli 3: At Empoli, Fuser set up

Argentina's Hernan Crespo's ninth goal of the season in the 10th minute and French midfielder Alain Boghossian's tally at the end of the first half. Fuser put the ball in the net himself for Parma (7-5-2) in the 57th and in second-half injury time.

Arturo Di Napoli scored twice for Empoli (3-5-6), including one on which replays appeared to show he trapped a pass with his hand.

Sampdoria 2, Milan 2: At Genoa, Ortega's fourth goal of the season, after Italy captain Paolo Maldini fouled Samp striker Francesco Palmieri on a breakaway, gave the hosts (3-5-6) — who fired coach Luciano

Spalletti this week after losing three of five — the surprising draw. Milan (7-4-3) led 2-1 in the 73rd minute on German striker Oliver Bierhoff's header.

Juventus 3, Salernitana 0: At Turin, Inzaghi collected the ball after a Zidane free kick sliced through the defensive wall and slotted home from 12 metres after 20 minutes of play. In the 29th, the

Italian international took a perfect through-ball from Zidane and sent a low, 8-metre (yard) shot into the corner. Inzaghi completed the rout in the 87th, knocking in a rebound for his eighth goal on the year.

Salernitana fell to 3-3-8.

Lazio 3, Udinese 1: At Rome, Salas scored in the 55th minute and again in injury time to rally Lazio

(6-5-3), which also saw Roberto Mancini hit his 152nd career goal, most among active players. Tomas Locatelli had put Udinese (4-4-6) in the fifth minute.

Bologna 1, Cagliari 0: At Cagliari, Signori pounded home a 20-metre (yard) free kick in the 50th minute for UEFA Cup quarterfinalist Bologna (5-6-3). Cagliari fell to 4-2-8.

Piacenza 3, Bari 2: At Piacenza, Giampiero Piovani (19th minute), veteran Giovanni Stroppa (43rd) and Massimo Rastelli (90th) found the target for the hosts (4-4-6), which moved four spots away from the relegation zone. Bari (3-9-2) failed in an attempt to tie the franchise record of 10 games without a loss.

Vicenza 0, Venezia 0: At Vicenza, two clubs battling relegation failed to put up much of a fight. Vicenza (2-6-6) is 16th in the 18-team league, Venezia (2-5-7) is last.

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BANGKOK, Thailand (AP) — For the region's big three in sports, Asia's version of the Olympic Games was largely a proving ground for the real Olympics.

Many Chinese, South Korean and Japanese athletes who won gold medals wondered aloud whether their performances were good enough to win on a world stage.

For others, it was a chance to shine without worrying about Americans, Europeans and Africans stealing the spotlight. In the Southeast Asian sport of sepak takraw, host Thailand could consider its five golds equivalent to world championships since the sport's other top nations were all here.

In all, the Thais won 24 gold medals, double their initial target and their previous best showing of 12 in 1966. Olympic gold medalist Samluck Kamsing led a haul of five gold medals in boxing's 12 weight classes. The hosts also won three golds in yachting.

Tiny Hong Kong, which had won only one gold in all previous games, took five this time, concluding with Wong Kam Po's victorious ride in the 200-kilometre cycling road race.

India, a big nation with relatively weak performances in recent games, won seven golds — most importantly its first in men's field hockey in 32 years.

For the fifth consecutive Asian Games, China was the biggest collector of gold medals, taking 129, or 34 percent of the 378 awarded.

South Korea won 65, and Japan 52.

Yuan Weimin, head of China's games delegation, said he was "basically satisfied, but not totally satisfied."

He estimated that roughly 55 of China's golds were won with results that were world class.

Diving team leader Xue Li was blunt about weaknesses, however, even though China swept all four gold and silver medals in the sport and showed off a rising star in

14-year-old Li Na.

"Winning these golds means nothing to us, for most of other Asian countries lag behind the rest of the world in diving and we Chinese divers mainly compete against ourselves in the games," Xue said.

"But in the world major competitions such as the Olympics or the world championships, there will be a galaxy of high-echelon divers. Even a small error can cost you the gold when you compete against them."

China's rowing team, which swept all 11 golds in that sport, also said Asian competition was too easy.

Japan, however, had some of the best individual performances.

Sprinter Koji Ito was voted the \$100,000 games' most valuable athlete award for his triple gold performance. He set an Asian record of 10 seconds flat in semifinals of the 100 metres, won the final in 10.05, ran away with the gold at 200 metres and added another gold in the 4 x 100 relay.

Second in the voting was Japan's Naoko Takahashi. With nobody pushing her, she missed the world women's marathon record by just one minute as she won the games' opening race by 13 minutes.

Japan beat China 15 golds to 13 in the pool, and came behind 15 to 12 in track and field, but suffered embarrassments in team sports, notably baseball and volleyball.

"We must use the setbacks in the games as an impetus

to put together the strongest possible team for the Sydney Olympics," said Japanese delegation leader Teruji Kogake.

Another embarrassment for Japan and its 2002 soccer World Cup co-host, South Korea, was that neither reached the semifinals of the Asian Games tournament. Iran beat Kuwait 2-0 for the gold, and China downed Thailand — South Korea's conqueror — 3-0 for the bronze.

World records fell on all seven nights of women's weightlifting competition, where China swept the gold medals.

Also in the big league department, South Korea brought along Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Park Chan-bo to help it win gold in baseball. In the gold-medal game, shortened to seven innings under the "mercy" rule, Park pitched a four-hit shutout as the Koreans trounced Japan 13-1.

Park, in turn, saw his Major League career benefit from a South Korean rule offering exemption from mandatory military service for gold medal winners in Olympics, Asian Games and certain other international competitions.

Controversy at the games included South Koreans' complaints about bowling, archery and equestrian events in which they swept the top three places. Under games rules limiting any nation to two medals per event, they had to give up the bronzes to the fourth-place finishers.

Thai officials also accused Chinese judges in wushu, China's martial art, of bias in favor of Chinese competitors. The Chinese did not immediately respond.

The Chinese, on the other hand, said agents for countries that they did not identify tried to bribe Chinese athletes into throwing gold medal matches.

China also was dogged by the specter of doping, after 11 of its athletes were disqualified from the last games in 1994 and swimmers were caught in positive tests as recently as the world championships in January 1998.

The Chinese said they had tested extensively just before these games to ensure clean performances and called continued questions unfair.

As of Sunday, just two doping cases had been disclosed at the games — two weightlifters, from Jordan and Kuwait, who had finished no better than seventh in their divisions.

"I hope we don't have any more in future," said Sheikh Ahmad Al Sabah, president of the Olympic Council of Asia, the games' governing body.

But, he added, "I am very happy that there have been only two cases, not important cases, not involving champions."

Thailand also was happy that the games proceeded without a major hitch. And its soccer team helped take the nation's mind off an economic crisis that threatened efforts to get all the facilities and operations ready in time.

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# Iraq steps up security to guard against coups

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq sent troops to major cities and its borders during Operation Desert Fox to guard against any attempt to topple Saddam Hussein's government, the press reported on Monday.

"Your soldiers will not let the enemies seize any opportunities," Saddam's number two Izzat Ibrahim said in a letter to the Iraqi leader outlining the increased security measures.

"Their eyes are wide open across the hills and valleys and mountain peaks to bring the wall of the embargo crashing down on the heads of the tyrant and his agents," said Ibrahim, who is deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, the highest political body in Iraq.

Only hours before the launch of the British and U.S. air strikes overnight Wednesday, Saddam split Iraq into four regional military commands for the first time since the 1991 Gulf war to "confront and destroy any foreign aggression."

While London and Washington said Desert Fox had achieved its objectives after four days of bombardments that inflicted enormous damage to Iraq's war machine, U.S. President Bill Clinton said ousting Saddam was still a long-term goal.

"Now, over the long-term, the best way to end the threat that Saddam poses to his own people in the region is for Iraq to have a different government," Clinton said Saturday.

Ibrahim said soldiers had been sent to the "border" of the northern region which has been outside Baghdad's control since a Kurdish uprising after the Gulf war, while members of the ruling Baath Party are on patrol in the major cities of Kirkuk and Mosul.

"The mission of Baath Party members is to ensure that life goes on as normal in the cities and to wipe out any attempt that would bring shame" on the cities, said Ibrahim, who is in charge of the northern zone.

Volunteers and tribesmen were tasked with "defending every street, every village and every hill," he said in the letter, which was dated Friday.

The Iraqi press also reported that meetings were held by other regional command chiefs with military and Baath Party officials and tribal leaders in their respective zones to discuss ways to "defend Iraq from any aggression."

Soldiers and armed tribesmen were out in force in Iraq's southern capital of Basra, which suffered heavy damage during the U.S.-British air blitz, according to journalists who visited the city on Sunday. In a letter to Ibrahim published in the press Monday, Saddam said: "Thanks to my God for giving men who are honouring their commitments to me."

Saddam, who seized power in a coup in July 1979, held a meeting of his leadership on Monday, the official news agency INA announced, but it gave no further details.

Ibrahim, who himself escaped an assassination attempt last month, scoffed on Sunday at U.S. efforts to overthrow Saddam and warned Americans they would suffer for Desert Fox.

"The regime the United States wants to change is not there by chance and has not been imposed. It draws its legitimacy from this nation," he said.

During Desert Fox, U.S. forces dropped what Baghdad termed "subversive" leaflets over Iraqi military units in southern Iraq, warning them not to head south toward Kuwait or challenge coalition forces.

The leaflets carried pictures of bombed out Iraqi tanks in Kuwait during the Gulf war and the message in Arabic: "This was Saddam's mother of all battles. If you threaten Kuwait, the coalition forces will destroy you again."

## Clinton up in opinion polls

WASHINGTON (AFP) — President Bill Clinton's job approval rating is surging, showing the public opposed to his removal from office despite his impeachment, according to polls published Monday.

A USA Today/CNN poll found 73 per cent of respondents approve of Clinton's job performance, up 10 points since a poll held prior to the U.S. attack on Iraq and Saturday's impeachment vote in the House of Representatives.

The poll conducted by the Gallup organisation showed those calling for Clinton to resign had dropped to 30 per cent from 33 per cent; 68 per cent now say the Senate should not convict him — up from 63 per cent before the House vote.

The House, voting along party lines, impeached Clinton for perjury and obstruction of justice. The case will go to the Senate in January.

The poll, which surveyed 852 people and has margin of error of four per centage points, found 72 per cent believe Clinton can still be an effective president.

A separate Washington Post/ABC News poll found public appetite for resignation has fallen: of the 1,285 people surveyed, the number calling for his resignation dropped to 42 per cent over the weekend from 57 per cent.

While 55 per cent of those surveyed said Clinton only had himself to blame for the impeachment calls, 33 per cent are now asking for his removal from office — down from 39 per cent last Tuesday.

## League considers Arab summit

(Continued from page 1)

"If you thought that you could touch Saddam Hussein, the result is that Saddam Hussein has gained more popularity in the Arab World," he told a U.S. journalist.

"The military solution is not a solution," he said. "We thought from the very beginning that if it was planned it was a serious miscalculation."

Abdel Meguid also attacked the U.N. Special Commission for Iraq's disarmament (UNSCOM) and called for the immediate resignation of its head, Richard Butler, whose last report alleging Iraqi non-cooperation triggered the four nights of air strikes.

Describing Butler as a "failure," who "appeared to be working for himself, not for the U.N.," the Arab League chief said the Security Council should institute a new mechanism for arms inspections.

"What has been done by UNSCOM, by Butler, is really a comedy that has turned to a tragedy," he said.

In another sign of renewed Arab solidarity with Iraq, the Lower House of Parliament recommended in Amman on Monday that the country lift the economic embargo on Iraq, and called on other Arab governments to do the same.

The call Monday by Jordan's 80-member Lower House was largely a gesture. It would have to be approved by the Senate, the Cabinet and then the King (see page 3 story).

The Jordanian government had warned citizens not to stage any pro-Iraqi rallies — but there were several weekend protests nonetheless.

In Sudan, thousands of people including some government officials again took to the streets Monday.

"Bloody playboy, you are a liar, Mr. President," read one banner in English, referring to President Bill Clinton. They called British Prime Minister Tony Blair the "little follower of his master."

In the Syrian capital, Damascus, scores of riot police were deployed around the American and British embassies Monday, two days after more than 1,000 demonstrators attacked the missions to protest the military strikes against Iraq.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry on Sunday expressed regret over the attacks and pledged to upgrade security at diplomatic missions and international organisations.

## Aid programme set back

(Continued from page 1)

It said two hospitals in Baghdad sustained damage as well as a "few primary schools."

It added that U.N. teams had been sent to the southern city of Basra, which also was hit, "to make further assessment of damage."

The United Nations monitors Iraq's distribution of food and medicine and central and southern areas.

In the Kurdish north, the U.N. humanitarian workers have sole responsibility. U.N. workers were not evacuated from the north during the latest military action.

Von Sponeck said his contacts with Iraqi officials, including Foreign Minister Mohammad Saeed Al Sahhaf, continued as usual.

"We discuss all kinds of problems," he said. "I don't detect any difference."

## Parliament accepts Turabi's resignation

CAIRO (AP) — Sudan's parliament on Monday accepted the resignation of its speaker as part of a political shuffle that is not expected to reduce his role as the most influential person in the country.

The 400-seat parliament has accepted the resignation of Hassan Turabi, Egypt's Middle East News Agency reported from the Sudanese capital of Khartoum. It gave no other details. The report could not be immediately confirmed.

The resignation must now be approved by President Omar Al Bashir, but that also is considered a formality.

Turabi had announced his resignation on Dec. 2 to work full time for the governing National Congress Party, whose monopoly on politics will end next year under a law passed Dec. 9.

The Political Associations Law, which comes into effect Jan. 1, allows for the formation of political groups that may contest elections.

Al Bashir, who banned all political parties after seizing power in a 1989 military coup, said recently that the door was open for opposition figures in exile to come back and form political associations.

But the presence of the hard-line Turabi at the head of parliament had cast doubts on the seriousness of the government's willingness to allow the opposition to flourish.

Political analysts interpreted Turabi's resignation as a government attempt to ease those fears.

However, there is still some apprehension because the new law only speaks of "political associations."

Turabi was strongly opposed to some parliament members' demand for a clear-cut reference to "political parties."



PRO-IRAQ PROTEST: A Palestinian protester holds a portrait of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and chants anti-U.S. slogans during a demonstration held in Gaza City on Monday. Some 300 Palestinians participated in a demonstration in solidarity with Iraq and against the U.S. and British air strikes. The demonstrators demanded an immediate end of all sanctions on Iraq (AFP photo)

## Butler denies collusion with U.S., shrugs off resignation

NEW YORK (AFP) — Chief U.N. weapons inspector Richard Butler on Monday denied that he had colluded with the United States over a critical report on Iraq and shrugged off calls for his resignation.

Butler defended the integrity of his Dec. 15 report to the United Nations in which he criticised Iraq for failing to cooperate with U.N. weapons inspections, saying it was "factual, clear objective and honest."

"We were not able to do the substantive disarmament work" that the team was tasked to do he said in an interview with the NBC Today Show.

"The simple conclusion that Iraq did not keep its promise of full cooperation is correct," he added.

The embattled Australian diplomat also vehemently denied that the slant and timing of the report was designed to bolster U.S. policy by giving the United States a pretext to launch air strikes on Iraq.

"It was not written for the purposes of the United States," he said. "It danced to no one's tune."

Five or six countries requested a briefing on the report in the days before it was submitted, including the United States, Britain and Iraq Butler said.

All of them were given a preview of his conclusions he insisted.

And he lambasted Russian calls for his resignation as "a diversionary tactic" which was deflecting attention away from Iraq's failure to provide information on missiles, and chemical and biological weapons programmes.

## Lebanese cabinet reverses ban on demonstrations

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanon's new government on Monday lifted a five-year ban on public demonstrations.

The cabinet — in its first meeting since Prime Minister Salim Hoss' government won a vote of confidence last week — also named a new commander for the country's 65,000-strong army, according to Information Minister Anwar Khalil.

He is Brig. Gen. Michel Suleiman, a Maronite Catholic, who most recently commanded forces in southern Lebanon.

Suleiman, 50, replaces Gen. Emile Lahoud, who was elected by Parliament as Lebanon's president on Oct. 15. The ban on street protests — which had often turned violent — had been in place since September 1993. It was imposed after nine people were killed in clashes between troops and militant Muslims protesting the first Palestinian-Israeli peace accord.

In 1992, street riots amid an economic crisis forced the resignation of then-Prime Minister Omar Karazi.

Khalil said demonstrations would be allowed, but only with Interior Ministry approval.

The cabinet's decision was "in line with the government's policy of protecting freedoms, particularly the freedom of expression," Khalil said.

The previous government of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri repeatedly banned protests

and, on occasion, sent the army into the streets to prevent labour unions from staging protests against Hariri's economic policies.

Suleiman, the new commander, joined the army in 1967. In recent years, he commanded the estimated 12,000 troops stationed along Israel's self-styled "security zone" in southern Lebanon.

The choice respected a tradition that the army commander be a Maronite under Lebanon's power-sharing formula among its 18 religious sects.

Lahoud has pledged to try to do away with some of the sectarian-based allocation of powers, and one of the appointments Monday reflected this.

The cabinet appointed army Brig. Jamil Sayyed, a Shiite Muslim, as head of the General Security Department, which handles foreign residents, publications and passports. That post traditionally was held by a Maronite.

## Government passes test of latest Iraqi crisis

(Continued from page 1)

For three days, Jordanians from all walks of life peacefully took to the streets to show their anger at the attack on Iraq, and to blast U.S. "double standards" in dealing with Israel on the one hand, and the Arab and Muslim World, on the other.

The latest crisis stands in stark contrast to the flare-up in February when a U.S.-led attack on Iraq seemed imminent. Then, the southern town of Ma'an erupted in violent pro-Iraqi demonstrations. Following two days of riots that left a Jordanian

dead and twenty people injured, the army was deployed in the curfew-bound town and police launched a house-to-house search for illegal weapons.

Public demonstrations in support of Baghdad were banned and then Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali hinted that a state of emergency may be declared if the attack on Iraq took place.

But this time round, the government of Prime Minister Tarawneh opted for a more relaxed attitude, allowing peaceful demonstrations, while quietly urging both the opposition and the media to refrain from inciting pro-Iraqi sentiments, avoiding the controversial crisis management policies undertaken by the previous government.

But officials maintain that Jordan should be commended for its stand during the recent crisis, especially when compared to Syria and Egypt.

As opposed to the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, as well as Egypt and Syria's communiqué last month endorsing the use of force against Iraq, Jordan took a

more neutral line.

U.S. president Bill Clinton invoked the communiqué in his speech last week to justify the attacks against Iraq, putting Syria and Egypt on the defensive. Some analysts believe that Damascus in particular, encouraged the violent anti-American and British demonstrations in its capital to balance its diplomatic stand.

"We are not in a defensive position," said one official. "We have handled this situation well."

But officials here realise that the country may not be so lucky again if another strike does take place, especially if it is prolonged. As such, they say, the American embargo policy on Iraq must be re-examined.

Otherwise the Iraqi dilemma will remain on the front burner for a long time to come, with dangerous domestic and regional ramifications.

The next few weeks, however, will indicate whether Jordan will be taking an active role in the diplomatic initiatives surfacing in the aftermath of the strikes, which call for a review of the policy of sanctions on Iraq.

## Iraq rules out any conditions, demands censure of U.S., U.K.

(Continued from page 1)

The attacks on the factories near Baghdad appear to be part of a strategy to destroy installations that could be used to produce weapons of mass destruction. Besides the missile facilities, nearly all of Iraq's military factories were attacked and many sustained heavy damage. Iraqi officials said, speaking to the Associated Press on customary condition of anonymity.

Iraqi officials said that among the sites attacked were the Al Nasser factory in Taji, 60 kilometres north of Baghdad, and the Al Nida factory, south of the capital. Al Nasser was heavily bombed during the 1991 Gulf War.

The officials said the attacks have virtually halted Iraqi efforts to produce short-range missiles. They said the speed of the attacks took them by surprise and workers did not have enough time to remove crucial equipment from either factory.

Blair said Monday that British Tornado bombers inflicted "awful damage" on the Iraqi regime's main supports, the elite Republican Guard and the internal security force within it, the Special Republican Guard.

"We certainly did an awful damage to their essential infrastructures," he said in an interview with CNN.

"We did substantial damages to the whole of the commanding and control systems that run the Special Republican Guard," he said.

"The Special Republican Guard were targeted particularly and they've been badly hit."

But he added that he could not be more precise until after a full battle damage assessment.

## Copt passed as Islamist to extort money

ASSIUT (AFP) — An Egyptian Christian pretended to be a member of the Islamist Jamaa Islamiya to extort money from residents of this former Islamist stronghold, police said Monday. Zakareya Khella, a pharmaceutical student at Assiut University in central Egypt and a member of Egypt's Coptic Christian minority, sent a letter to an engineer demanding a financial contribution to the Jamaa. The letter said that the money should be left in an envelope in front of the door of an Assiut mosque. The engineer, Talaat Mohammad, went to the police, who arrested Khella Sunday when he collected the envelope from the mosque door.

## Carreras raises money for leukaemia fight

LEIPZIG (AFP) — Spanish opera singer Jose Carreras has received pledges of seven million dollars for his foundation to fight leukaemia after a German television gala, the TV station said Monday. Carreras' show Sunday evening was on the eastern German public TV station MDR. The concert, followed by 5.5 million viewers, was in Leipzig, and retransmitted on the national public network ARD. German television has raised more than \$26.5 million since 1995 in yearly broadcasts for the Jose Carreras foundation. Carreras had leukaemia in the 1980s. He has recovered and created a foundation to help medical research against the disease.

## Dutchman wins \$15.2 million in damages for car crash

LONDON (AFP) — A Dutchman won a record \$15.2 million in damages Monday after he was left paralysed by a car crash. The High Court in London made the award to Martijn Biesheuvel, who lives in Amsterdam. The amount is two and a quarter times the previous highest personal injury pay-out in Britain. Biesheuvel, then 22, was left a paraplegic when a car in which he was travelling with four friends hit parked vehicles in Bath. None of his fellow passengers suffered any significant injuries. Biesheuvel, now 27, had just completed his final exams in business administration at Bath University in May 1994 and had been due to start work as an accountant in London.

## Egypt issues its first royal stamp

CAIRO (AFP) — Egypt has printed a stamp bearing the image of a member of its royal family for the first time since the 1952 revolution that abolished the monarchy and chased King Farouk out of the country. "This is the first stamp depicting a princess in 46 years, and we made it because we wanted to pay homage to Fatima Ismail who sold her most beautiful jewellery in order to found Cairo University," a postal ministry spokesman said. The stamp was printed in December for the 90th anniversary of Cairo University and celebrations in memory of the princess, the daughter of Egypt's viceroy, the Khedive Ismail, who created the Suez Canal.

Handwritten signature or mark in Arabic script.